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News analysis

The battle in Seattle and the 'politics of the future'

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Police and protestors face off during "The Battle in Seattle."

Harry der Nederlanden

SEATTLE, Wash. – They were scenes that recalled the pitched street battles of the late '60s and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago: cops in helmets wielding billy clubs; clouds of tear gas; burning, overturned cars; smashed shop windows; masked demonstrators giving the victory sign; dishevelled citizens being manhandled by men in black; photographers scurrying everywhere.

What was it all about? A meeting of the WTO. Most of us probably had to do a little research to find out what the letters stand for: the World Trade Organization – a bunch of bureaucrats and lawyers appointed by governments all around the world to iron out the fine points of trade agreements. Hardly the kind of body to arouse strong passions or to mobilize the masses.

Yet thousands of demonstrators representing dozens of organizations descended on Seattle for three days and turned it into a war zone. Most of us were taken completely by surprise by the passions surrounding the meeting. Such meetings have been conducted for decades without raising a ripple.

Disparate dissenters

If you had been following events on the Internet, however, you may have been less surprised. Many of the organizations represented on the streets of Seattle had been campaigning and recruiting vigorously on the Internet for a long time. They also used the Internet to galvanize, consolidate and organize their opposition, so much so that the WTO established a well-designed site of its own to refute the charges levelled against it. Following the numerous links from the WTO to all the organizations with a bone to pick will yield enough bedtime reading to keep you up for a week.

Among the protesters were environmentalists of various shades who want the WTO to see to it that multinationals don't pollute in developing countries; farmers' organizations, some of which want subsidies removed (Canadians), and some of which want them protected (Europe); labor unions who want better wages and

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Banks should 'give back' to communities: coalition

Alan Doerksen

OTTAWA – Canada's banks need to be giving much more back to their communities, in ways such as helping to pay for low-income housing, asserts the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition (CCRC). The coalition has come up with recommendations which could create $15 billion for affordable housing in Canada in the next decade, if adopted. Although the CCRC has asked Finance Minister Paul Martin to legislate changes to force banks to help low-income people, Martin has agreed to adopt only some of its recommendations.

BRENT JONES

"Affordable" housing at its worst.

Barriers to affordable housing

In late November, the CCRC released a paper entitled "More Money Down: The Case for a Community Reinvestment Act to Ensure Financial Institutions Help Solve Canada's Affordable Housing Crisis." The paper details significant barriers individuals and developers face when trying to get financing from banks and other financial institutions for affordable housing. One such barrier is that institutions such as the Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) reject mortgage applicants if their debt is greater than 32 per cent of their income, even though the CCRC claims there is no evidence that people with higher debt levels are more likely to default on a mortgage.

In addition, affordable housing developers sometimes face difficulties getting financing from banks because of policies that deny loans to non-profit organizations. LIFE*SPIN (Low-Income Family Employment Sole Support People Information Network), a member organization of the CCRC, faced this situation recently.

Biased against low-income

"One of our projects is a housing development for women with psychiatric needs," explains Catherine Turner, director of community economic development for LIFE*SPIN. The agency recently approached Canada Trust for financing but was initially turned down because "the person at the bank said, 'We don't deal with non-profit projects,'" reports Turner. Although Canada Trust later backed down on that statement, Turner says, "We never did get a successful resolution to it." Later on, Canada Trust offered LIFE*SPIN a $15,000 line of credit, which Turner describes as "amusing." LIFE*SPIN arranged for financing elsewhere.

Turner strongly agrees with CCRC's recommended changes to bank laws, and notes that her agency played a role in drafting those recommendations. She believes Canadian banks discriminate against low-income people, and gives the example of LIFE*SPIN clients who "use cheque-cashing services and lose a portion of their cheque," because banks will not cash their cheques. She wants to see more disclosure of to whom banks give mortgages (and who is denied). She also wants to see a national housing policy from the government. Turner believes the government will listen to the CCRC's recommendations, and take some action on them.

The CCRC is asking the federal government to introduce a law

See **NEW LAW** *p. 2...*

'The Old Year now is passing'

Time: Have we made it a god? . . . Editorial, p. 4
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News

New law could free $15 billion for affordable housing

... continued from page 1

similar to the U.S.'s Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), which has been in effect for 20 years. According to the CCRC, the American Community Reinvestment Act requires financial institutions to track demand for home and affordable housing mortgages, and approval and rejection rates by gender, race, income and neighborhood. These statistics reveal whether the institution is discriminating against certain groups of applicants, and if so, it is required to take corrective action.

As a result of the Community Reinvestment Act, American banks have reinvested more than $1 trillion in disadvantaged communities across the U.S. in the past decade, of which about $315 billion has been for affordable housing, states the CCRC. The coalition believes that a similar act in Canada could create $15 billion in financing for affordable housing over the next decade.

"The 20-year successful model of U.S. community reinvestment laws can be, and should be, adopted by the federal government to ensure that Canada's big banks do their part to help provide affordable housing for all Canadians," asserts Duff Conacher, chairperson of the CCRC.

Conacher reports that Finance Minister Martin has been listening to the CCRC, and actually "has adopted about three-quarters of what we're looking for" into his proposals for changes to Canada's banking laws. Martin plans to introduce these changes as legislation in February.

Martin concurs with the CCRC on "the right to a basic bank account at a set cost." This is important, says Conacher, because "there's been a problem of people with low incomes getting access to basic banking."

FOUR BY FIVE PHOTO

According to Kripa Sekhar, the executive co-ordinator of the Saskatchewan Action Committee on the Status of Women, women have an especially hard time getting mortgages from banks. "Women are still asked the question, 'Where is your spouse?'"

Voluntary codes don't work

Even though Canada's main banks had agreed to a voluntary code in which only two pieces of identification were necessary to start a bank account, Conacher says a CCRC survey showed that 99 out of 103 bank branches "required either photo ID or to be employed." Conacher concludes, "Our report showed that voluntary codes don't work."

Martin also plans to ask banks to disclose well ahead of time when local branches will be closed. New legislation will require banks to give six months' notice before closing a branch in a rural area, and four months' notice for an urban area.

But Conacher insists that Martin "is failing to address the banks' role in creating affordable housing.... That's the main gap we're concerned about."

Conacher also wants Canada's banks to abandon the 32 per cent rule about mortgages. "We want an investigation of this rule. If it is found there's no reason to use this as a rule, there should be a different way to do this."

The American CRA has a better requirement for mortgages, says Conacher. "It's a positive requirement. You have to meet the deposit requirements of everyone concerned.... These programs make it much easier for first-time home-buyers."

Conacher explains that the CRA has disclosed prejudice at work in America's banks. "They've found in the U.S. that if you were black or Hispanic, you'd be two or three times more likely to be turned down" for a loan than if you were white.

The CRA also forces banks to take corrective action if they plan a bank merger. This affected Canada's Toronto Dominion bank recently when it took over Waterhouse, a New York-based financial institution. "When TD took over Waterhouse, Waterhouse had to make pledges on how to improve," says Conacher.

Greg de Groot-Maggetti, socio-economic co-ordinator for Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), believes, with the CCRC, that an act similar to the CRA would work well in Canada. He thinks the CRA was first introduced in the U.S. because "in poor communities, banks were taking deposits and were 'red-lining.'" By that he means that banks were marking out poorer communities on maps, and not making loans to people from those areas. But the CRA "required banks to report on loans," explains de Groot-Maggetti. "They were required to invest a certain percentage of loans in the community. It's a principle that CPJ supports. It comes out of the principle of economic equity."

De Groot-Maggetti says Canadian banks are discriminating against low-income people. "There's a voluntary system for banks to meet commitments to serving poor customers," he explains. "Everything I've seen shows it's not working. There need to be stronger measures."

He thinks the federal government should come up with stronger banking laws. In today's society, "access to banking is vital," he asserts. But, he adds, Canadian banks "probably should be part of the solution to creating affordable housing."

Discrimination against women too

Kripa Sekhar, the executive co-ordinator of the Saskatchewan Action Committee on the Status of Women, believes Canadian banks still discriminate against women. Women have an especially hard time getting mortgages from banks, she asserts. "Women are still asked the question, 'Where is your spouse?'"

The Saskatchewan Action Committee is a member of the CCRC, and supports its plans to bring in tougher banking rules. Canadian banks "are very cold," Sekhar asserts. "They have little or no humanity, although they have our money."

Sekhar would like to see legislation like the American CRA come into effect in Canada, where, she says, "We don't have anything like it.... The CCRC has been trying to get the federal government to commit to that for several years." In the U.S., the CRA has resulted in "all kinds of programs and help from the banks."

Canadian banks also discriminate against "people of color" and aboriginals, Sekhar contends. She knows this from personal experience. Sekhar describes herself as "a woman of color."

People of color tend to live in low-income situations, even if both spouses are working, because they tend to get small salaries, says Sekhar. "Women make up a large majority of the poor," she adds. "A lot of single women leave their home with little or nothing," says Sekhar, referring to women who leave their husbands, often because of abuse.

Sekhar believes the CCRC's plan to change banking laws in Canada is quite realistic and "something that is needed. It would certainly alleviate some poverty."

Coalition calls for action from Finance Minister

Alan Doerksen

OTTAWA – Although Finance Minister Paul Martin proposed some changes to Canada's banking laws in a June 1999 policy paper, the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition is calling for him to take stronger action to ensure that Canada's banks serve Canadians more fairly, especially low-income Canadians.

Here are the key recommendations from the CCRC's recent policy paper "More Money Down: The Case for a Community Reinvestment Act to Ensure Financial Institutions Help Solve Canada's Affordable Housing Crisis," followed by "gaps" in Martin's proposals as cited by the CCRC. (The CCRC's critique is set in bold after each applicable recommendation.)

- As in the U.S., banks and other financial institutions should be required to track and publicly disclose the demand for loans and investments by businesses, community development projects (especially affordable housing), and individuals seeking a home mortgage on a branch by branch, neighbourhood by neighbourhood level.

(Martin has only proposed tracking business loans on a regional and national level, which will do little to reveal discriminatory lending practices, especially for housing.)

- As in the U.S., governments should review and grade the performance of financial institutions in lending, investment and service and impose penalties for failing grades.

(Martin has not proposed a review or grading system or penalties, so financial institutions have little incentive to serve all Canadians fairly and well.)

- The federal government should place a moratorium on bank mergers and takeovers of other institutions (including the TD Bank/Canada Trust proposal) and expansion of bank powers, until two years after a CRA-like law is enacted in Canada to determine whether our big banks serve all Canadians fairly and well.

(Martin is not even reviewing TD Bank's and Canada Trust's records in serving Canadians, and will only review bank-to-bank mergers in the future.)

- The federal government should conduct a nation-wide study of the impact of the use of the 32 per cent debt-to-income rule on access to mortgages by people with low incomes, and if it is found that the ratio leads to discrimination, financial institutions should be required to develop non-discriminatory methods of assessing credit-worthiness.

(Martin has not even examined the use of this rule, despite human rights cases in Quebec that have found it to be discriminatory against people with low incomes.)

- The federal government and provincial governments should add social and economic condition as a prohibited ground of discrimination in their respective human rights codes as another means of ensuring that financial institutions do not discriminate against people with low incomes in the provision of their services.
- All levels of government must dedicate funding to affordable housing, especially for start-up capital for housing developments.

Politics/News

Principalities & Powers

Ruling and serving are not mutually exclusive

David T. Koyzis

I have sometimes felt it necessary to remind my students that the Bible is not a textbook on politics any more than it is a physics or chemistry textbook. All the same, I am struck by the extent to which Scripture uses political metaphors to describe the relationship between God and his people. In fact, these seem to be dominant metaphors.

During the Advent season we looked forward liturgically to the coming of the Kingdom of God in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. During Christmas we recall his lowly, albeit royal, birth in Bethlehem. At Epiphany we remember the visit of the magi from the East and the profound political implications this had for Judaea, as King Herod feared for his own rule and unleashed his wickedness on innocent children.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a kingdom which God's chosen ruler, the Messiah, would inaugurate. Daniel wrote: "In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not pass into the hands of another race: it will shatter and absorb all the previous kingdoms and itself last for ever" (Daniel 2:44 NJB).

The psalmists, too, look to a God who is King, not only over his people Israel, but over the whole earth. "God reigns over the nations, seated on his holy throne" (Psalm 47:8). "His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth" (Psalm 72:8). "Arise, God, judge the world, for all the nations belong to you" (Psalm 82:8).

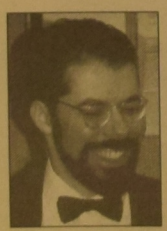
Language of servanthood

Of course, not everyone is comfortable with this sort of kingly language. Some believe it has no relevance to a democratic age in which political power is shared by government and citizens alike. Others are offended by the very mention of a God demanding obedience and prefer a divine partner who will simply sanction our various chosen pursuits. Scripture makes it clear, however, that God is God and that he stands in judgment over us and our actions.

Yet this is hardly the whole story. Jesus is not merely God's anointed ruler; he is his Son. At Christmas we celebrate God's incarnation – his coming into the world to assume our humanity and to suffer for his people. If Scripture is filled with kingly language, it is also permeated with the language of servanthood. In fact, one of the earliest titles for Jesus in the first Christian centuries was Servant, as we see, for example, in the magnificent prayer near the end of I Clement, one of the writings of the so-called apostolic fathers.

What this should indicate to us is that, despite contemporary opinions to the contrary, kingship and servanthood are by no means contradictory. Whether they are appointed to, elected to, or inherit their positions of authority, earthly rulers are called by God to serve those over whom they are set. If they use their positions of power to enrich themselves at public expense, then we rightly judge them to have abused their offices and to have failed in their servantly calling.

But if they act justly – particularly by defending the defenseless – then they are acting as true servants, both of God and of their fellow human beings. During this Christmas season, let us remember with joy that the God who calls us to a life of justice and servanthood has redeemed us in Jesus Christ.



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Canadian corporation assists construction of life-threatening Colombian dam

Kathy Price

TORONTO — A Colombian indigenous leader whose people and means of survival have been irreparably damaged by a hydro-electric dam constructed with credit assistance from Canada's Export Development Corporation (EDC) testified at parliamentary hearings into the crown corporation on November 16 in Ottawa, reports the Inter-Church Council on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA).

Kimy Pernia, a member of the Embera Katio nation of northern Colombia, testified before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which is conducting hearings into the legislation governing the EDC. Pemia's testimony focuses on the fact that Embera and non-indigenous fishing communities in the region have already seen their food security, livelihood and health put at serious risk by the Urra I dam, a multinational mega-project which went ahead without any prior consultation with those living in the area that would obviously be affected.

100 negative impacts

"We've identified more than 100 negative impacts on our people and on the environment on which we depend since the dam went up and it will only get worse when operations begin and our land is flooded to fill the reservoir," states Pernia. "This project has already caused many deaths, including the assassination of Embera leaders who have challenged the dam."

The Urra dam, with financing assistance of an $18 million (US) loan from the EDC, has blocked the migration of fish up the river to the Embera Katia communities, depriving their inhabitants of both their main source of protein and their livelihood. The incidence of disease has increased and dozens of people are reported to have died, their immune systems debilitated by malnutrition. Stagnant water created by the dam has brought mosquitoes and a deadly disease: malaria.

Embera leaders who have voiced their opposition to the dam and called for consultation with indigenous communities have been murdered, as have a university professor and an ecologist who challenged the human and environmental impact of the dam. In April, a request for asylum at the Spanish Embassy in Bogota was made on behalf of 2,500 Embera Katio, following the assassination of yet another of their leaders on April 24. Lucindo Domico Cabrera was shot 8 times in the early evening at his house by two armed, masked men. Cabrera, a health worker, was one of the leading spokespersons for communities affected by Urra.

Threats from paramilitary

"Anyone who dares to speak out about the Urra megaproject is accused by paramilitary forces of being involved with the guerrilla and with that pretext, they have declared both our communities and our leaders to be a military target," states Kimy Pernia. "My people live in great fear of both imminent attack, as well as what the future holds for us without land or fish."

Kimy Pernia has come to Canada at the invitation of the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA), a Canadian social justice coalition formed by more than 20 national denominations and religious communities. Last year, ICCHRLA joined with the Embera Katio and 24 highly respected organizations from Colombia and more than a dozen other countries to call for an injunction from the Constitutional Court of Colombia to halt the Urra megaproject in order to prevent further violations of human rights.

"The Canadian churches want assurances that the operations of Canadian enterprises like the Export Development Corporation, and the Canadian companies it supports with credit assistance, are not contributing to an exacerbation of the violence in Colombia," states ICCHRLA South America Coordinator Bill Fairbairn, who will call on the parliamentary hearings to take up recommendations the Colombian indigenous leader will present in his brief.

Affirms Fairbairn: "Canadian public institutions should not be supporting projects that lead to violations of human rights."

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Editorial

Tempus fugit – but are we having fun?

Marian Van Til

Time flies. We human beings watch and mark the seasons, decades, centuries and even millennia as they come and go. But in the ordinary scheme of things, our thoughts are taken up with life on a much more intimate scale: our own life cycles and those of the people dearest to us.

Our lives are filled with all sorts of "watching and marking," with rituals small and large – from our daily personal dressing, hair-fixing or shaving, to the way we and our family or set of friends celebrate birthdays or anniversaries. And beyond our private walls, we watch and mark a week, a month, a year, a "church year," in the rituals of worship and workplace and school.

Sometimes it all gets tedious. Another load of laundry (same clothes, same sorting ritual); another ride to work or school (same route, same vehicle); another church service (same liturgy, same songs, same texts); another family birthday (same event, same place, same people).

Three millennia ago, the writer of Ecclesiastes asked cynically (I can imagine him throwing his hands in the air, shrugging): "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" His answer isn't cheery: *Nothing.* Or as Charles Dickens would have put it: *"Bah, humbug!"*

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The Ecclesiastes Preacher wearily goes about proving his point:

Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.
All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
they return again.
All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.
What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.

Time captives

The Preacher notwithstanding, all that repeated watching and marking of times and seasons should not be wearisome. It becomes so when we allow ourselves to become captive to time, to focus on time – our precious time ticking by – rather than on the substance of those "times and seasons": when we're impatiently "celebrating" that birthday while thinking about the work that needs doing at home; when we're "worshiping" while thinking of that game we'd rather be watching or that friend we'd rather be with; when we're "listening" to our spouse or best friend while thinking of those clients we're meeting with tomorrow or that assignment that still needs doing.

Is our preoccupation with "time's ever-rolling stream" a result of the Fall? I believe it is. In the un-Fallen, immortal state in which God created us, we would not have been time-bound as we now are, I think. Time would not have painfully impinged on us as it has since the Fall. It would not be increasingly crushing us like some massive G-force, its accelerating "flying" speed pressing us into our seats, as it were, leaving us seemingly helpless against its inevitability. If "time flies when we're having fun," it also flies, and ever faster, the more we allow ourselves to become its slaves.

Casting away a false god

I'm sure that a lot of us have discovered, or are discovering, that avoiding such slavery takes real, purposeful effort. And prayer. It requires prayer because it's tough to slough off *any* aspect of our "old nature"– and this slavery-to-time aspect of our unredeemed selves may be more pervasive and pernicious than we think. We're imbedded in a society which in "managing" time has permitted it not only to become unmanageable but to transmogrify into a god. And casting away false gods – perhaps especially ones nicely dressed and respectable and appearing to be helpful and true – necessitates the Spirit's intervention.

Surprisingly, perhaps that crochety old Preacher can help us here. After murmuring and moaning about the utter meaninglessness of practically everything (or its "vanity," as the KJV has it, a word which has connotations that add to the meaning of "meaninglessness") – pleasures, work, folly, even wisdom – the Preacher begins that famous litany which puts everything, including time, in its place:

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven;
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

The Preacher discovers that when we allow God to order things, when we follow his timing, there is actually time, and a time, for everything. And not only time for it, but the ability to revel in it, to romp through life with relish rather than to shuffle through it sighing, "Woe is me. I just don't have time...."

Yet even with his newfound Meaning, the Preacher realizes that not all of life is riotous celebration. There are some strange, disconcerting things in that list of his: a time for war; a time to hate; a time to scatter stones; a time to kill; a time to give up searching; a time to die.

He knows we're (still) living in a fallen world, one with myriad emotional, spiritual, philosophical and historical complexities. On *this* earth, we are still subject to all the vagaries and viciousness of a world wounded by sin. So, yes, there is a time to die: *Time like an ever-rolling stream/soon bears us all away,* said William Croft almost 300 years ago in a poem which is, for many of us, a favorite hymn. (Actually he said "...bears all its sons away," but that's another editorial!).

In that same poem, in line with the Preacher, Croft confesses that God has been "our help in ages past" and will continue to be "our hope for years to come." Any fears we may have about the harried present or the uncertain future dissipate when we, too, make that confession.

Time *will* bear us all away (unless Christ returns first). But we really need only remember that time, too, is God's servant, as each of us is. And then it becomes easy to say, joyfully and fearlessly: *Our times are in God's hands.*

A perspective on 2000

Ty Hofman

As we get closer to the turn of the year to 2000, the view is different depending on how long you've lived on planet Earth. For the five-year-old it will be pretty much just another day. For the person who is 101 it will be a milestone of unbelievable proportion. That was almost the experience of a Christian Reformed minister, the Rev. Leonard Verduin, who died just last month at the age of 102. He was born in 1897 and was quietly hoping he would live into the year 2000. He would have experienced life in three different centuries. He missed it by 50 days.

Now, I am not anywhere near a century old, but my perspective does focus from the 1920s, before the Great Depression, when life was a lot different than it is today. Of all the modern facilities, I knew only two. One was the automobile, which had just broken into the life of our community. Not everyone had a car, but several did. I remember when some of the people still came to church by horse and buggy and tied their faithful nags in the church barn during the service.

The other modern device was the telephone, which would have been difficult for a child today to identify. It hung on the wall and was activated by the caller via a crank on its right side. That would send out a series of long and short rings. If you heard your ring (ours was five shorts) you would lift the receiver and begin talking, hoping that all of your neighbors would stay off the line so you could hear your caller.

There were neighbors, (particularly, the lonely, perhaps) who just couldn't resist picking up the news when other peoples' phones would ring. As the number of listeners grew, the voice of your caller would grow weaker and nearly disappear. A kind request to please get off the line would sometimes produce the desired results. Obviously there were few secrets told over the telephone.

War upon war

I clearly remember the Great Depression which began with the stock market crash of 1929 and lasted into the mid-'30s. It was combined in our area with the ravages of the Dust Bowl. We had neither crops nor other income. When we did grow some wheat, it would return little more than the cost of transportation. We survived on the limited produce from our garden, and on our farm animals.

The end of the Depression was hastened by the outbreak of the Second World War, *in 1939 in Europe and in Canada* where we lived, ending in 1945. The war impinged on the totality of our existence. What a time to be alive. What a day when the enemy capitulated!

Life in the postwar period was exciting, and burgeoned with new activity. But soon the Korean War dampened our spirits; then the tragedy of Vietnam; and since then, so many wars and skirmishes it's been mind-boggling.. We have fought the Cold War, the "war on poverty," the "war on inflation" and the "war on drugs." You could possibly name some other wars.

Through all these years we were far away from the year 2000. I clearly remember wondering how close I might come to experiencing the turn of the millennium, and couldn't really bring myself to think that I might see that day. After all, I would be nearly 78, and at that time, that was far beyond the life expectancy of someone not yet 50. But today, in a matter of a few weeks I will have experienced that event.

Still, it's a good life

At this point there are many things I could reflect on, but the one that strikes me is the marvelous providence of God that has pervaded our lives over those many years with all of their vicissitudes and perils, despite the horrible destruction of war and the tragedy of mindless international and civil strife, and the onslaughts of disease and the struggle to overcome its ravages. Life is so good, so beautiful, so filled with opportunity to seek – and find – the Kingdom of God: every morning, and every week and every year; to count our blessings as we worship our Creator and Redeemer in the fellowship of the living Body of Christ. There is still so much love in the world.

And I stand amazed at the wonders of modernity, including television, air travel, modern medicine and the computer, all of which have been developed almost exclusively in my lifetime.

I can only say that 1922 was a great year to be born. I have a feeling that I've pretty well seen it all. And I am dumbfounded at how fast the year 2000 has dawned upon me!

Dr. Tymen Hofman is a retired Christian Reformed pastor who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For a quick Letter to the Editor, please send an e-mail to: cceditor@aol.com, or send it by fax to: (905) 682-8313.

'Calvinist' and 'Reformed' not the same

Referring to Mr. Brinkman's letter ("How should CC change?" Nov. 29), I would like to make a case for "Reformed" over "Calvinistic." To me, Calvinism means going back to Calvin, whereas Reformed means going back to the Bible. "Reformed" means to re-form theology, faith and practice [based on] biblical teaching. I am appreciative of John Calvin's theology, but I would guess that he might be saddened by an "I am of Apollos, I am of Paul" attitude.

About 30 years ago a small group of which I was a part was awakened to the significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of life. It was a definite turning point in our lives. It helped to open the whole Bible in its significance for all of life, and finally sank the notion of full-time service for only the privileged few.

Though I no longer worship in a faith community which would identify itself as Reformed, I still cherish that awakening I experienced back then. I am encouraged, too, by meeting people, both prominent and ordinary, who are discovering Reformed theology though outside the Reformed churches.

An article which appeared recently in a church magazine [positively] identified a trend towards Reformed theology as one of the seven things that would make the founders of that denomination roll over in their graves. I don't believe these changes would be so likely with an emphasis on Calvin as with an emphasis on reforming theology to include what the Bible teaches in its entirety.

Vern Gleddie
Edmonton, Alberta

Thanks for the Christmas issue – and the memories

Thank you for the very lovely, substantial and valuable Christmas issue of CC. I appreciated very much the artwork, the biblical theme, and the stories, as well as the regular editorial features. The CC team is to be congratulated on a very fine job. You are going from strength to strength!

I was personally especially interested to see the page devoted to my friend and counselor, Mirth Vos, who died on November 14, 1999. I appreciated the fine review of her book by Diane Klein and the fitting tribute by Tom Venema. And I was delighted and touched that it included a picture of Mirth and myself singing together.

For me, that picture is rich in all kinds of personal associations and ecclesiastical symbolism. It was taken on the evening of June 19, 1997, at the meeting of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. The occasion was the discussion of the report of the Committee to Study Inclusive Language for God, which Mirth chaired. This was a gender-related issue on which Mirth and I were in strong agreement, though we had differing views on ordaining women. The song we were singing together in the picture was "Jesus, with Your Church Abide," which reminds us of the deep unity we have in Christ.

June 19, 1997, was also seven weeks after the last entry in Mirth's book, *Letters to Myself on Dying*, and seven weeks after I had begun seeing her as a client. To my mind, the picture taken on that day speaks powerfully of the various kinds of unity and diversity and strength and weakness that we all experience together as we sing praises to our common Lord.

Al Wolters
Hamilton, Ontario

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Education

Calvin's *Institutes* win Christian book award in Russia

Christian Reformed World Literature publishes book that wins praises in St. Petersburg

Mary Meehan

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Nearly five years ago, Christian Reformed World Literature Ministries began working with Moscow State University for the Humanities to translate Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* into Russian. A team of Russian scholars, including professors, intellectuals and pastors, began the labourious process of translating the foundational work of Reformed theology, written by John Calvin in 1559.

This year, the project was completed, and the third and final volume of Calvin's *Institutes* was honored with the 1999 first prize theological book award, presented at the Christian Book Fair in St. Petersburg.

Calvin's credibility elevated

"We had confidence in the people we were working with that we were going to get a really good translation, and we're very happy because this award will elevate the credibility of Calvin's work," says John De Jager, director of Christian Reformed World Literature Ministries. "Calvin is still considered a heretic with a non-relevant message by many people in that country."

The Christian Reformed Church has had a presence in the Soviet bloc since The Back to God Hour began broadcasting on shortwave radio about 15 years ago. The denomination wanted to find ways to provide a Reformed insight on Biblical Christianity to those who were interested. As interest grew, Jeff Busscher, a Russian missionary who lives in Holland, Mich., was appointed co-ordinator of CRC Ministries in Russia.

The denomination currently offers several titles published in Russian. Busscher works with a variety of Christian organizations in Russia to distribute the books. A Russian distributor who works with the denomination exhibited Calvin's *Institutes* at the recent St. Petersburg Book Fair.

"I am reading (Calvin's *Institutes*) now. When I am finished, I will give it to my brothers and sisters to read. It will give them great joy to better know and understand God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. John Calvin in the *Institutes* gives me the opportunity to explain to people more fully and in a detailed manner how they can come to God," says a reader from the Orlov region of the former Soviet Union.

In all Russian translation projects, World Literature Ministries works co-operatively with Russian groups by providing project management and funding support. Moscow State University of Humanities agreed to publish Calvin's *Institutes* as a work of philosophy, rather than a religious book. Since that time, the *Institutes* have been read by hundreds of intellectuals in the former Soviet country. There is also new and growing interest in Reformed theology in Ukraine and Belarus.

Building a new society

"Our hope is that over the next 100 to 200 years Calvin's work will be foundational in building a new Russian society, in the same way that it has been foundational in Western society. All of the Reformers have had an effect, but it seems to be Calvin in particular," says De Jager.

World Literature is a ministry of CRC Publications, the official denominational publisher for the Christian Reformed Church. At present, more than 50 per cent of its sales go to more than 50 other denominations, churches and organizations. CRC Publications publishes church school curricula, worship resources, periodicals, devotional books, and materials for studying the Bible and current issues.

World Literature Ministries publishes materials in Korean, Spanish and Russian. With more than 300 titles in Spanish, it is the largest publisher of Reformed materials in that language. Its website is: **www.crcpublications.org** .

Campus Culture

Peter Schuurman

'Faithbomb'

Various students have introduced me to four new websites in the span of a week and a half. Maybe there was a day when students would come into the Campus Ministries centre with a book they were puzzling over. Now it's websites. I'll share two of them with you.

The first is a "Christian" website which I will not name. The student who mentioned it to me said that one of his friends mentioned it to him as an example of how he understands the Christian community. It quotes the Bible extensively, but it is so filled with hate and condemnation (towards homosexuals) that to associate it with the name of Christ in any way is nothing short of blasphemy. It was scary, nauseating, and sad all at once. I couldn't believe that this site is associated with a named church.

The second one a student brought in from one of the campus magazines that lie in the hallway. In it was a half-page advertisement for faithbomb.com – a site that promises you can write your own bible. The site explains how religion must no longer come from the top down – it must now be built from the ground up, the ground being human experience. By using our own insights and guidance, we can build our own new religion.

The site takes as its inspiration the mutt. "It's a mutt world," it explains, describing how ambiguous identity has become:

"Your mom's Spanish Roman Catholic (sort of), your dad's a Jew from Miami (or so he says). You know that tradition has been unintentionally boycotted due to the combining of different faiths and you're left to determine your own constitutions. If you have one of those happy, everybody's-a-Christian families you've got nothing to worry about (and you probably don't need to be reading this). But all the rest, defining your belief system as a mutt in a mutt world is a challenging confusing task."

Convictions and certainties

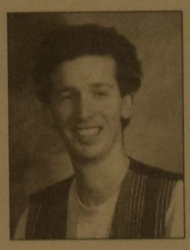
This site is dedicated to helping people develop their own religion. They insist that it's an on-going endeavor, for one never really arrives. Always reforming, I guess.

I wonder if the playfulness and uncertainty that seems to reign in the latter website is not in fact, in some way, a reaction to the violent certainty that shouts from the first one. "Truth is harsh," claims the first, adding that "honey draws more flies than vinegar."

"Religion is a social endeavor," claims the second, explaining how anyone who thinks he or she is right and other people are wrong is just being childish.

On the one hand, these statements stand on opposite poles – rigid authority and relative indifference. On the other hand, ironically, the second is just as certain as the first – certain that certainty is not possible or desirable.

I like the way it was put at a campus ministers' conference I recently attended: Arrogance crouches quietly in all our hearts, as we all "lust for security." Perhaps, then, it is better when testifying to others to speak of our convictions rather than our certainties. For we do not have the Truth. But rather, the Truth has us, and we follow by faith, not by sight.



Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed chaplain at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario.

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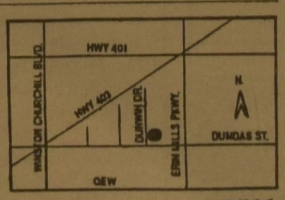

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Arts/Media

Tipping the scales of justice:
Why are TV lawyer shows so popular?

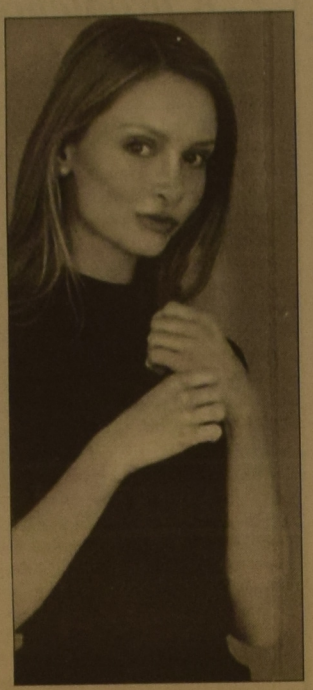
Ron DeBoer

The O.J. Simpson trial of the mid-'90s gave television an unprecedented look at the inner workings of a courtroom. A world audience played jury as prosecutors and defense lawyers presented evidence, stretched the truth and outright lied – all in the name of justice.

The word "sidebar" entered the common vernacular. American author and curmudgoen Ambrose Bierce once said that a lawyer is one skilled in the circumvention of the law. Shakespeare was even more curmudgeonly about lawyers: "First thing we do is kill all the lawyers."

By nature, lawyers are thought to be liars. Jim Carey's son in the movie *Liar Liar,* tells his classmates on career day that his father is a liar. "You mean *lawyer*, son," his teacher says. "No, he's a liar, ma'am."

Television's presentation of law firms and court rooms have not boosted the general opinion of lawyers. Witness the current TV line-up of lawyer dramas. But why are we fascinated with courtroom dramas, and what does this window into the world of sinfulness and justice do for our spiritual well-being?



Ally McBeal *star Calista Flockhart*

Grey 'justice'

To begin, let's take a look at three of the more popular lawyer shows on TV today. *The Practice* stars a young criminal defense attorney named Bobby Donnel who starts his own law firm.

Non-judgmental, Donnel does not care whether a client is guilty – only whether or not he can get the defendant off the hook. The conflict with which we are presented is not merely that between criminal and victim, but between the defense lawyer and the "antagonist" prosecutor.

While *The Practice* started out heavily in courtroom strategy, a love-interest for Donnel was introduced this fall, re-emphasizing the importance of the lawyers over the victims and alleged criminals. *The Practice* expresses well our vague legal system. Everyone is guilty and no one is guilty; the question on most episodes is "how" guilty.

'Personal issues' trump the law

Family Law is a new lawyer show this season. The original premise of this show borders on the quirky: two divorce lawyers get a divorce, with the husband cleaning out the office and taking most of the staff and all of their clients with him. While much of the energies of principle character, Lynn Holt, focuses on seeking revenge against her husband, the show deals with family crises ranging from the ultra-private, like impotence, to the tragedy of drug-addicted parents and the children caught in the middle.

I've seen only two episodes of *Family Law*, but in a culture in which family breakups and divorce are increasingly common, I find the content most compelling. The other commendable quality about *Family Law* is that it presents moral dilemmas for viewers. Unlike in *The Practice*, these lawyers are human, and even pontificate on the well-being of their clients.

Ally McBeal star Calista Flockhart plays a young attorney who joins a prestigious law firm whose staff includes her ex-boyfriend. As in *The Practice* (both are David E. Kelly creations), the issues in the courtroom play second fiddle to the personal and emotional turmoil within the characters, most notably Ally McBeal, who, in fantasy sequences, flashbacks and voice-overs, reveals her inner angst and disillusionment. Her "sexual issues," "mother issues" and "self-esteem issues" dominate the major plots of the show.

Ally McBeal is more a navel-gazing drama than legal drama as evidenced by a new weekly 1/2 hour *Ally* for those who can't get enough of star Flockhart in the regular one-hour time slot.

It's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of any of these legal dramas. Most contain strong storytelling, good character development and interesting plots. But lawyer dramas are popular for other reasons.

Beyond fiction

Outside the dramatic genre itself, television is guilty of providing a plethora of legal plotlines in various formats. Witness the popularity of Judge Judy and People's Court; consider the endless episodes of *Prime Time Live*, *48 Hours* and *20/20* investigations and courtroom suspense thrillers in which we get commentary by lawyers and jurors, and even the judge presiding over the courtroom.

We watch media lawyers volley opinions of present real-life court cases on CNN progams like *Burden of Proof*. We feel we are experts. The O.J. Simpson trial allowed us to play lawyer, jury and judge and forever changed our view of the legal system. In the last week alone, I've heard reference to the O.J. Simpson trial in two different lawyer dramas. The writers know the Simpson court case has become a part of our collective subconscious, whether we're Canadians or Americas.

Ultimately, we must ask ourselves why we're watching courtroom dramas. Entertainment? If so, what entertains us: courtroom strategy, human sinfulness or the sex lives of the characters? Is it because we have a genuine interest in seeing justice meted out or because we're fascinated with greed, jealousy, and deceit?

Christians have to be fundamentally opposed to the basic philosophy presented in lawyer dramas (and, I suppose, in culture in general) which we've somehow come to believe there is no real truth and anything can be argued, even disputed.

Perhaps our own thoughts about justice and judgement draw us to courtroom programs. We will someday be judged: *guilty* or *not guilty*. No slick lawyer will defend us then. There will be no objections, no appeals, and no one else present to destroy or embellish our credibility. The truth will be revealed. No lawyer drama can give us that.

Ron DeBoer lives in Waterloo, Ont.

A cultic cat gets out of the bag

Frank DeVries

It seems to me that the last secular Christmas celebration of the millennium has been even more interesting than usual. Of course there remains the anomaly of non-Christian homes (as well as such buildings as Sikh temples) decorated with all manner of Christmas paraphernalia, appurtenances and lights, in all manner of shapes and colors – it is almost as if Jesus is telling his nay-sayers: "You don't believe in me? Okay, that's your choice, but celebrate my birthday you *shall*!"

However, in a "Christmas store" window I saw something really quite different: on display was a creche featuring, of course, the Baby Jesus, Joseph and Mary, several shepherds, sheep, a cow, a goat, and the traditional "kings." But lo and behold, bending on one knee in a truly worshipful position, offering Baby Jesus a Christmas-wrap wrapped present and dressed in all his familiar regalia was also – you guessed it – Santa Claus.

I felt outraged. I wanted to storm into the store demanding that they remove the blasphemous thing. Then came to mind the poignant and (to me) most wonderful Christmas story ever written, "Dance in the Desert" by Madeleine L'Engle. Suddenly I realized that the sculptor or assembler of the scene may have had a particularly insightful revelation regarding the worship of our new-born King. For in that display, even mythical, imagined creatures (as in L'Engle's book) bow down to him.

I went into the store and asked how much that Nativity scene cost. I could have it for $78.99 plus tax, which meant that I couldn't have it. I went back later to take another look at it, but it was gone. I still wonder who bought it; and why.

Oops!

But I have another peculiar tale to tell, for we – that is, my wife, Celia, and I – learned that this Christmas, although for only two days, a particular Christmas cat was finally and officially let out of the bag.

As we drank coffee one morning in the food court of the Richmond Centre Mall in Richmond, B.C., I noticed that on all 100 or more tables in that food court there had been placed folded cardboard notices announcing the hours the mall would be open during the holiday season.

Fair enough. But above the listed hours was printed in large type: HOURS OF WORSHIP.

Finally, brazenly, and of its own accord, consumerism had admitted of its existence as a bona fide religion! And it was of extreme interest to me to notice that on December 25, Christmas, the mall would be closed to all its worshippers.

Two days later we returned. The management had belatedly covered up what it had so recently, openly proclaimed. Every single notice had the words "OF WORSHIP" scratched through, by hand, with a black felt marker.

Frank DeVries is a retired Christian school teacher and principal who lives in Nanaimo, B.C.

Student sues his Catholic school over contents of website

NEW YORK, N.Y. (EP) — Fifteen-year-old Peter Ubriaco is suing for $1 million the Catholic high school that expelled him because of his personal website's contents.

"A private school student doesn't lose the protections of the U.S. Constitution," said Ubriaco's attorney, George Shebitz. "He certainly doesn't lose them in the comfort and security of his own home."

Albertus Magnus High School president Joseph Troy said the boy's website included "some pornography and some violence." Ubriaco's father said he removed the website after learning of its vulgar content, but insists there was no pornography or threats against the New York City school.

Attorney Kevin Hasson, with the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty in Washington, expects the school to prevail. "If anybody has First Amendment rights in this case it's the religious school's First Amendment right to dismiss this kid without being sued in court," he said.

Church

World Council of Churches supports cyberspace peace project for Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (EP) — The World Council of Churches (WCC) is supporting a "Human Chain in Cyberspace" Internet campaign which promotes peace and the reunification of the Korean peninsula.

The campaign, launched December 1, will run through January 31, 2000, and is an initiative of South Korean churches and civil organizations, including the Christian Broadcasting System.

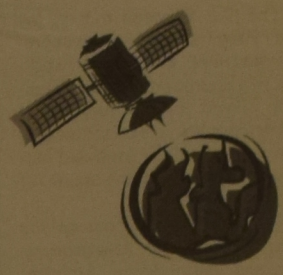
The aim of the campaign is to make the international community aware of the divisions separating the people of the Korean Peninsula, and to "generate a global movement for peace." People all over the world are invited to enter their message for peace on the campaign's website: **http://www.peacekorea.org**, and symbolically join a "human cyber chain." Organizers hope that 10 million people will join the symbolic action for the reunification of Korea.

Clement John, executive secretary of WCC's international relations team, explained the World Council's endorsement of this campaign as part of the organization's longstanding support of efforts towards reconciliation and peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.

John noted that the roots of division of the peninsula came out of Cold War politics. "As we enter the next millennium," he said, "it remains a festering wound in the hearts of the Korean people despite the dismantling of the Cold War apparatus."

John calls on member churches and ecumenical partners to join the human chain in cyberspace as "an expression of solidarity with the people and churches of Korea in their efforts to promote peace and reunification."

Missionaries hope satellite phones will let them avoid Y2K problems



ORANGE, Calif. (EP) – Concerns about Y2K-related communications problems have influenced Wycliffe Associates, a support team of Wycliffe Bible Translators, to acquire satellite phones for missionaries worldwide. The effort by Wycliffe has resulted in the purchase of approximately 45 satellite phones, which have been placed throughout branch locations in countries where telecommunications might be a problem after December 31, 1999.

The satellite phones are the size of laptop computers – portable, compact and convenient. They weigh less than six pounds and provide voice, data, fax and e-mail capabilities. Housed in magnesium cases, the units offer 48 hours of power and 2.5 hours of talk time. Energy cells for the phones can be recharged using a car battery, gas generator, or solar panel options that fit well with the conditions in which many missionaries live. Wycliffe Associates hope that the satellite phones' capabilities will be an advantage over conventional telecommunication systems that might be affected by the millennium bug.

"There is still a great deal of concern about Y2K power failures in Third World countries," said Paul Rabenold, vice president of information and technology for JAARS, the technical/service arm of Wycliffe Bible Translators. "In fact, there is still concern about Y2K problems in most countries and there is significant concern about the continents of Africa, Asia and South America as well."

No 'infrastructure' needed

The satellite phones are not dependent upon any telecommunications infrastructure in Third World countries. Wycliffe translators and their families often face emergencies – natural disasters, medical emergencies and political turmoil – that necessitate immediate and reliable communication for assistance.

The initial efforts by Wycliffe Associates to fund placement of the phones in the field has sparked additional interest among supporting churches and families of missionaries to provide the phones to individual missionary families as well. Initial plans by Wycliffe Associates are to place 50 phones in vulnerable missionary locations. JAARS wants to place an additional 50 with the goal of every Wycliffe entity having access to instant and dependable communication to the outside world. "We anticipate the number of phones in the field to grow," Rabenold said. "They don't cost much more than a computer."

Christian Reformed deacons form new Canada-wide group

Marian Van Til, with files from G. Kreeft

BURLINGTON, Ont. – The leaders of Christian Reformed deacons' "conferences" from across Canada have agreed to merge into one nationwide diaconal organization. The new cross-country group will be called Diaconal Ministries of Canada (DMC), and its activities will begin with the New Year.

Making up DMC will be the British Columbia Diaconal Conference, Diaconal Ministries of Eastern Canada, the Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference and the Paliser Triangle Diaconal Conference (Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan). The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the CRC's development and relief agency, will play a role in the group as well.

DMC says it is "committed to providing strong support to the [officebearers] of the church and especially to the ministry of deacons right across Canada." It hopes this new umbrella organization, "with CRWRC as an active member," will better enable it to "provide professional and useful resources to deacons [in ministering] to the needs in our own communities, and that this will enlarge our ministry not only in Canada but around the world."

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Minnesota Christians find strength in numbers

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (Religion Today) — Churches in Minneapolis-St. Paul used Gov. Jesse Ven tura's words to haunt him: 68 churches, in a full-page, Nov. 19 *Star-Tribune* ad promoted "Strength for the weakminded," a reference to Ventura's comments that organized religion is for "weak- minded people who need strength in numbers."

The churches paid $13,500 for the ad, which listed the addresses of all the congregations, with the words: "There's a workout location near you," the Associated Press reported.

British Christians fast in preparation for millennium

ENGLAND (Religion Today) — Christians throughout Great Britain are fasting and praying as the millennium nears. They are part of the Anno Domini Prayer Countdown, which began Nov. 28 and runs for the first three weeks of Advent.

Fasting is "not just staying away from food or pleasure, it is about spending time with God," said Joel Edwards, general director of the Evangelical Alliance, which organized the fasting and prayer initiative.

Some 150,000 Anno Domini prayer guides have been distributed at churches, schools, universities, prisons and retirement homes. The guide, which provides biblical passages, prayer suggestions, and the "Millennium Prayer" written by 14-year-old Anna Compton of Ipswich, is available on the Evangelical Alliance's website at: **http://www.eauk.org**. Churches in Australia, the U.S., Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, South Korea and Spain are also taking part.

Church

Are Christian holidays too 'pagan'?

A leading cult expert says No

COSTA MESA, Calif. (EP) - Though Christmas is a time of celebration for Christians, it's also a time of uncertainty for an increasing number of those Christians who worry that their holiday traditions may have roots in paganism. Should Christians abandon holiday traditions that may have non-Christian roots? No, says Gretchen Passantino, who directs "Answers In Action" with her husband, Bob. The Passantinos are authors of *Answers to the Cultist at Your Door* and other books.

"When you stop to think about it, everything human in this world after the fall of Adam and Eve is 'pagan' in the sense that it comes from people who were separated from a right relationship with God," Passantino told journalist Dan Wooding.

New, God-oriented perspective

"The question is not whether pagans celebrated the coming of spring and fertility, or had a mid-winter festival focused on new life, a spring celebration around romance and marriage or a time of remembering the dead. What matters is that faith in Christ gives us an entirely new, God-oriented perspective on all of these important issues."

Passantino noted that even if Christmas has roots in pagan mid-winter celebrations, the Christian faith has given the celebration a whole new meaning. "When we realize that God loved us so much that the Son became human, born of a virgin, to be our representative before the Father, then birth in the midst of decay takes on a whole new meaning," she said. "We celebrate Christ's birth as a triumph over the pagan superstitions of the waning sun during winter – a symbol of our destiny in death without Christ and our new life in Christ. We triumph over the pagan superstitions that there is no ultimate goal of history, no eternal life, only transitory, cyclical life like the vegetation cycle. I see the Christian celebration of the key events of redemptive history as a testimony to Christ's triumph over sin, death and devil, not as a compromise with paganism."

Warning against paganism

Sometimes conservative Christians cite Old Testament passages such as Deuteronomy 12:30 as a warning that no practices of pagan origin should be incorporated into Christian worship. Such verses do carry an important warning, Passantino says. "We are not to worship false gods or imitate false gods in any way. One cannot serve the only true God and any false gods at the same time...."

Those same Christians may argue that because observance of Christmas and Easter is not commanded in the Bible it is wrong for Christians to celebrate them. But Passantino says, "If we were restricted to only those things commanded specifically in Scripture, we would not be able to function in the contemporary world. Scripture does not command us to read magazines, listen to the radio, watch television or drive cars. The fact that something is not specifically commanded in Scripture does not mean that we have no idea how we should respond to it. God's Word gives us the principles for dealing with everything in our lives, whether it is technology, persecution or holidays."

Passantino concludes: "By biblical principles we know that we should not read magazines that glorify sin or promote false worship. The same can be said of other mediums. We should not drive cars in an unsafe manner.... If one's participation [in Christmas and Easter celebrations] is to bring glory to God, to remind us of his wonderful plan of redemption and to honor God's acts in human history, then it is pleasing to the Lord."

God's 'two days' of patience

Chapter & Verse
Al Wolters

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
(2 Peter 3:8-9, NIV)

Many believers in the New Testament church expected Jesus Christ to come back very quickly, perhaps in their own lifetime. As the decades went by, however, and many believers died before the Second Coming, it became clear that Christ's return was not as imminent as many had initially supposed. In fact, the early church had to deal with the problem of what biblical scholars call "the delay of the *parousia* [i.e., the Second Coming]."

The Second Epistle of Peter was written just before the Apostle's death, when this problem was causing considerable difficulty in the church. Christians had been speaking for so long about the imminent return of Christ that unbelievers began to scoff at them because of the delay.

But the presence of such scoffers, says the Apostle, is a mark of "the last days," that is, the days between Christ's first and second coming. Such scoffers will say that the promise of Christ's return is an empty promise: in fact, human history will simply continue to go on the same way it always has ever since the creation of the world.

Two catastrophic cleansings

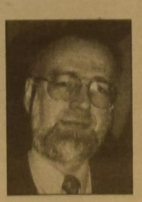
But this is wrong, says Peter. What these scoffers deliberately ignore is the fact that world history had already been interrupted by a cosmic catastrophe at the time of Noah's flood. God had intervened in judgment once, and he will intervene again when Christ returns. The first catastrophe was a cosmic cleansing by water, but the second catastrophe will be an even more radical cosmic cleansing by fire.

It is in this context that the Apostle writes the words we have quoted. The delay is not evidence of God's slowness, but of his patience. It may seem to us that the Lord is slow in coming again, but he has a different time scale than we do. For the Lord, 24 hours is like a millennium, and a millennium is like 24 hours. God is an artist who paints on a world-historical canvas; he deals in eons, not minutes. From Abraham to Jesus was almost 2000 years, interrupted by two 400-year silences (between Genesis and Exodus, and between Malachi and the New Testament), and from Jesus to our times has been another 2000 years. What seems like a very long time for us is only an episode in the grand narrative of the biblical epic of God's plan of salvation.

God's delay and missions

No, it is not because God is slow that we have to wait; it is because he wants everyone to be saved. That is the explicit teaching of the Apostle. The reason the Second Coming did not happen at the end of the first century, and has still not happened on the threshold of the 21st century, is that God is patient; he wants to give a maximum number of people the opportunity to repent. In a word: the reason for the delay is missions. As many people as possible must hear the gospel so that they may turn to God, repent, and be saved by the blood of Christ.

In the almost 2000 years since Christ ascended to heaven and promised that he would return, the gospel has spread to almost every corner of the globe, and is currently advancing at an unprecedented rate in many parts of the world. That spread of the gospel is the fruit of God's forbearance, and we do well to remind ourselves, as we mark the end of the second millennium A.D., that it is the business of the church to spread the gospel, and in that way to promote the coming of the Kingdom until the Lord comes again. For come he will.



Al Wolters teaches Bible and Greek at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario. He is struck by the frequent single-N misspelling of "millennium" – a misspelling which, he notes, suggests an entirely inappropriate Latin etymology.

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News/Sports

University of Manitoba honors low-German literacy project

WINNIPEG, Man. (MCC) – A language teacher has been honored by the University of Manitoba for her work with a Plautdietsch (Low German language) literacy project in Mennonite villages in Mexico.

Rosabel Fast teaches English to international students at the university and has been given its "Outreach" award for extending its services and expertise, even though it had no direct involvement in her Mexico work aside from giving her time off.

Fast spent five weeks in Mexico last summer piloting the project for the Mennonite Central Committee. She taught three Plaut-dietsch literacy classes in two villages in the Cuauhtemoc area in July and August – two for children and one for women.

Many of the conservative Mennonites in Mexico speak only Plautdietsch but are taught to read in High German, which the young people generally don't comprehend. "Their whole world outside the village is basically non-comprehension," Fast said, explaining the need to teach reading skills in a language they fully understand.

Mother your mother tongue

"There is a large body of literature that supports the notion that people should learn to read and write in their mother tongue first," says Abe Peters, Kanadier programs director for MCC. "Usually this also helps people learn other languages too."

Peters says not everyone in the colonies, though, is supportive of learning to read Plautdietsch. It isn't always respected as a language and there isn't much reading material currently available in it.

However, much of the Bible has recently been translated into Plautdietsch. "Now they can read it in their mother tongue," said Peters. "I think it's very worthwhile."

Fast also wasn't sure at first how willingly people would participate but found a number open to the literacy project. "I was very pleasantly surprised at how receptive people in the villages were to the idea," she says.

Although she only had five days or so with each group, she said the students caught on quickly. "The time was just way too short," she said. "I think I did everything I set out to do, but it just added a lot of pressure."

Fast, who volunteered with MCC as an education worker with Mennonites in Mexico from 1992-95, plans to return to Mexico again next summer, with several more teachers in an expanded literacy program.

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Duncan - CKAY . . 10:00 am 1500
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Penticton - CKOR . 8:00 am 800
Port Alberni - CJAV 7:00 pm 1240
Prince George - CIRX 7:00 am 94.3
Princeton - CHOR . 8:00 am 1400
Smithers - CFBV . . 9:15 am 1230
Summerland - CHOR 8:00 am 1450
Vernon - CJIB . . . . 9:30 pm 940

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Montreal - CIQC . . 7:30 am 600

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Brooks - CIBQ . . . . 8:00 am 1340
Ft. McMurray-CJOK 8:30 am 1230
High River - CHRB . 6:30 pm 1140
Edmonton - CKER 11:00 pm 101.9
Westlock - CFOK . 7:30 am 1370

SASKATCHEWAN
Estevan - CJSL . . . 8:00 am 1280
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London - CKSL . . . 7:00 am 1410
Newmarket - CKDX 9:30 am 88.5
Oshawa - CKDO . . 8:00 am 1350
Owen Sound -CFOS 10:30 am . . .560
Pembroke - CHVR 10:00 am 96.7
Sarnia - CHOK . . . 7:30 am 1070
Stratford - CJCS . . 8:30 am 1240
Windsor - CKLW . . 7:30 am 800
Wingham - CKNX 10:30 am 920

NEW BRUNSWICK
Saint John - CHSJ . 9:00 am 94.1

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Charlottetown - CFCY 7:00 am 630

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Digby - CKDY . . . . 6:00 am 1420
Halifax - CFDR . . . 8:30 am 780
Kentville - CKEN . . 8:30 am 1490
Middleton - CKAD . 8:30 am 1350
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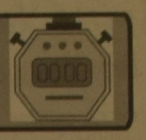
THE BACK TO GOD HOUR

Hate, Vancouver-style

After the Buzzer



I admit it. I felt a little snide toward the guy. But I can't say I hate him. There are a bunch of folks out here in Vancouver who do. And I mean *hate.*

Steve Francis and the Houston Rockets came to town a few weeks ago to play the Vancouver Grizzlies. It was a battle of the NBA bottom-feeders. It was also the biggest show of hatred towards an athlete I've seen in this town. Ever. During the entire game, the crowd lambasted him every time he touched the basketball. It was electric, it was gut-wrenching; it was pure stupidity.

All this in kind, polite Vancouver. How could such a thing happen in this coffee-swilling, peace-loving sponge of a city? Besides being the most pretentious city west of Toronto, it's also an oasis of peace and tranquility, is it not?

Let me back up and explain how Steve Francis became Public Enemy No.1 out here. Back in June, Francis was the No.2 overall pick in the NBA draft, and the Vancouver Grizzlies selected him. To their distress, he refused to sign with the team and eventually forced an enormous 11-man trade that landed him in Houston.

He told the press that it was nothing personal, that he just wanted to play point guard and not on the two-point in Vancouver. Never mind. Vancouverites were slighted. Their feelings had been hurt. To them, his decision was a personal rejection of them on a civic and national scale.

'Cerebral' response

The crowd's response when his team came to play the Grizzlies was neither subtle nor quiet. When the wounded citizens weren't calling him a crybaby and a whiner, they were shouting obscene chants in unison. There were small signs and large banners: "Breathe if you hate Steve Francis"; "Francis is impotent"; "Francis, your Grandma can't stand you either." Even the Grizzlies management was directly involved in inciting the crowd. An ad in the *Vancouver Province* said: "Come see Barkley, Olajuwon, and *that other guy*!" During the first timeout, a video screen showed an old black-and-white film clip of Francis the Talking Mule.

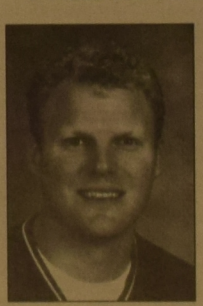
To make matters worse, Francis wasn't affected in the slightest. He played as amazingly as ever. He scored 24 points and completely ignored the crowd. After he had fouled out with 2:45 left in the game, the crowd turned their attention to Charles Barkley with highly cerebral comments such as, "Barkley sucks!"

Manipulation

I'm endlessly proud to be a Canadian. I take a smug pride in the fact that we usually think first and act later. Canadians are the diplomats of the world. Who else could survive this long with a mess like Quebec without blowing each other to pieces?

The Grizzlies game was a shocker for me. Yes, we are a civilized and peaceful country. But the hype and idiocy of the media are systematically manipulating us. At the game that night, you could imagine the Grizzlies management team sitting back and rubbing their hands together. They had turned the business decision of one player into a big, messy uproar and filled 15,000 seats in the process. All through a bit of advertising and selective propaganda.

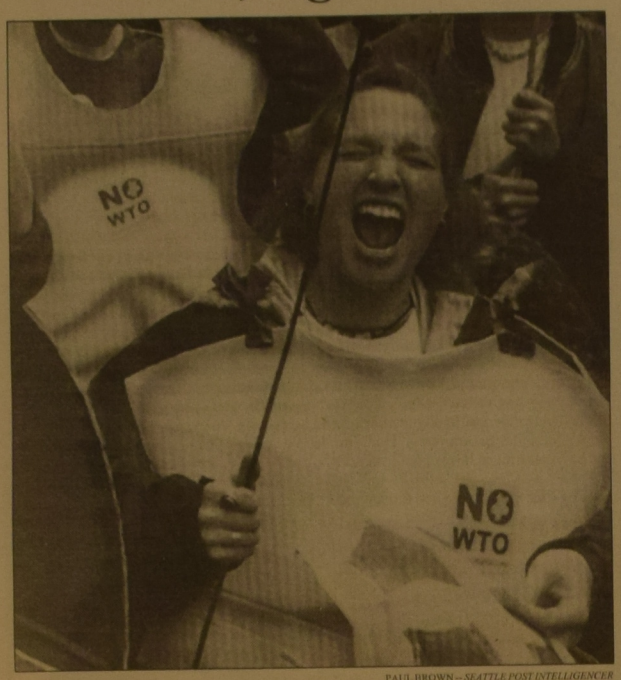
I wonder how our Savior feels when he sits in the crowd at a game like that. He must marvel at how we've turned even the most basic of human gifts (the ability to run, jump, and shoot) into a ridiculous mishmash of hyped-up silliness. If only pro sports were about talent and praise for that talent's Creator instead of politics and manipulation. Maybe in the next millennium.



Tim Antonides teaches Grade 5 and coaches at Surrey Christian School, Surrey, B.C.

Agriculture

Globalization is inevitable, right?



PAUL BROWN -- *SEATTLE POST INTELLIGENCER*

One of a legion of environmental protestors against world trade talks held recently in Seattle.

Elbert van Donkersgoed

GUELPH, Ont. — Last winter, in a series of 16 workshops on "Market Clout," members of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) explored globalization. Participants expressed frustration, concern and bafflement about a globalization that appears inevitable.

With the recent "millennium round" of the world trade talks, we were bombarded with the rhetoric of a more international economy being by definition a richer economy. If we want to be richer, globalization is inevitable, right?

The family farmers at last winter's workshops were not so sure. They had a number of cautions about globalization.

Caution one. Globalization's much touted economic benefits are often camouflage. There was a lot of pizzazz in making that international deal. Trade missions to Tokyo, Japan are media events; economic development conferences in Detroit or Buffalo are, well, ho-hum.

Being international, making the multinational deal, is its own kind of high. Family farmers think globalization might be driven as much by human nature's need for excitement as by long- term economic fundamentals.

Caution two. Globalization changes the structure of farming. When transnational food merchants come into big city hinterland seeking partners in their multinational schemes, they are not looking for family farm entrepreneurs. They look for someone to hold a mortgage on land or buildings, and for cheap labor. In global firms, management decisions are made at head office.

Globalization doesn't need family farms

In family-farm Ontario, management decisions are made on the farmstead. Globalization doesn't need the family farm entrepreneurs that have built rural Ontario.

Caution three. Mortgage holders with cheap labor exist elsewhere in the world. Global firms can find their supply of bulk food commodities as easily in Brazil or the Philippines. When they do, they erode the vitality that farm businesses bring to the economy, environment and community of Southwestern Ontario.

Caution four. Canadian farm policy, based on the mountains of grain we export from the prairies, leans towards globalization — at the expense of Ontario agriculture. Eighty-five percent of Ontario farm and food export — in fact over 75 per cent of all Ontario exports go to the U.S.

Fifty million people with good incomes live within a day's drive of southwestern Ontario. Right-on-time delivery to these folks is what we do well. Our most sustainable farm profits are in selling food to folks in Chicago, Detroit, Toronto and New York. Ontario agriculture's marketplace is just a truck-drive from the Great Lakes — not the global market.

The rhetoric of globalization is all around us. Let's not be fooled into thinking that it will sustain the vibrant agricultural economy of rural Ontario, as we know it. It won't.

Elbert van Donkersgoed edits **Earthkeeping Ontario** *and has been senior staff with the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Canada since 1971.*

Food fallacies

COUNTRY COUNTERCULTURE

VERN M. GLEDDIE

Hard To Swallow, By Doris Sargent and Karmi Evans, Alive Books, 1999, is a detailed documentation of the health risk of trusting large corporations and the Canadian government with our food supply.

Twenty years ago the authors were mothers at home with small children and attending weekly meetings with other mothers. The women wondered about the ingredients in the baby food they purchased. Ms. Sargent, a registered nurse, with Ms. Evans proceeded to research and produce a book on food additives. They have followed it up with the current and more comprehensive book.

Health officials tried to ban book

Compiling information on the thousands of chemicals added to food products was difficult. Worse than that, however, was trying to obtain public information from government health officials. Those officials, in fact, tried to ban publication and distribution of the first book.

Why would government, supposedly protectorate of citizens, be so anxious to stop publication of material documenting the addition of questionable compounds to food?

Almost 300 food additives were selected by Sargent and Evans for a description of nature, use, dangers and official sanction. Many additives are not even required to be listed on product labels. Because of the health risks, usually carcinogenic, some chemicals, though allowed in Canada, are banned in Europe and the U.S.A.

I began jotting down the additives that are allowed in bread, butter, margarine and jam. After filling a page with lists, I was still in the A's in the alphabetically listed 300.

Nail polish remover in spice extract?

I learned about compounds such as acetone, a powerful solvent most commonly used as nail polish remover, but also used in the manufacture of waxes, plastic, varnishes, explosives, chloroform, *and* spice extract and meat marking ink.

According to the authors, the government says there is no need to regulate added flavor and color because of very small quantities used in a given food. But artificial colors and flavors make up 80 per cent of all food additives and therefore get to everyone daily. Very little research has been done on those chemicals, but a number which have been tested have been found to be carcinogenic. Artificial colors and flavors have also been linked to hyperactivity, learning disabilities and behavioural problems.

Aspartame is popular with those wishing to avoid sugar. But an indulgence facilitated by giant "food" companies, it seems, is always dangerous. A diet drink held for a few weeks at over 85 degrees F (29.4 degrees C) has no aspartame left. It has broken down into its components: formaldehyde (toxic), formic acid (toxic), diketopiperazine (brain tumor), aspartic acid (brain tumor), and methanol (a deadly poison). Aspartame is being considered for possibly triggering chronic fatigue syndrome, Alzheimers disease, post-polio syndrome, epilepsy, manic depression, multiple sclerosis and other maladies.

These are only a few examples of a host of problems for consumers documented by the authors. The book contains extensive excerpts from the Canada Food and Drug Act for the reader's information on virtually any processed food.

Reading through the Food Act, it might seem that the government is there to facilitate the large food product manufacturers, rather than to protect the food supply. After severe cutbacks in funding, Health Canada now sees itself as overseer with little direct involvement. Food and drug labs have been dismantled. Research and testing are contracted out.

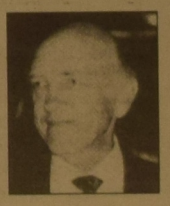
Some feel Ottawa has completely removed itself from legal liability. In fact, testing and reporting has now basically been turned over to the manufacturers. Within those arrangements there are seldom, if any, requirements, only recommendations. Furthermore, applicants who consider it inappropriate or unnecessary to provide information are sometimes excused from doing so.

Government is abdicating its role

In *Hard to Swallow*, there is a large section on genetically engineered foods. With government abdicating its role of testing and monitoring, the danger of such runaway technology has never been greater. Compounding the problem is that many farmers ,desperate to stay in business,are clamoring for the genetically engineered crops being offered by the huge seed/chemical/food conglomerates. May God help us.

Interestingly, *Hard to Swallow* is dedicated "To God who promises, 'He who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the end' (Philippians 1:6)". The book ends with an anonymous quote: "Once again the foolishness of our rulers hath made the goodness of God of none effect."

It is both disquieting and encouraging to know that food processors supply a market dependent entirely on consumer buying decisions. There is no reason to manufacture a product no one wants. The unfortunate thing is that we are all prone to go for taste, texture and convenience, and the suppliers know it. However, there are alternatives to what the chemical food purveyors offer us. We can also embarrass the government into tougher legislation, including complete labelling.



Ask your local library to stock *Hard to Swallow* or buy a copy yourself for ready reference. It may help you to avoid debilitating disease.

Vern Gleddie owns and operates a sheep ranch outside of Edmonton, Alberta.

On time

Naked at the millennium

Harry der Nederlanden

In order to set our minds at ease, allay anxiety and defuse some of the wild-eyed speculation associated with the end of the millennium, many cooler heads have pointed out that our division of time and of history is completely arbitrary.

There is, of course, something arbitrary about dividing a day into 24 hours of 60 minutes each, about dividing the year into 52 weeks of 7 days, and about counting the years *anno domini*, that is, since the birth of Christ. Behind the arbitrary divisions, however, there are also natural rhythms such as day and night, the phases of the moon and the cycles of the seasons. These root our numerical, mechanical divisions in rhythms of nature that are anything but arbitrary. These "natural" cycles are just as inexorable and indifferent to our desires and plans, however, as the steady movement of the clock.

The introduction of the clock and the wristwatch have turned the people of industrial nations into clock-watchers.

Checking the clock to see whether it's time for a break or for lunch, to see how much time before the end of this class, this worship service, or this working day is probably the most obvious way that we notice time.

The introduction of the clock and the wristwatch have turned the people of industrial nations into clock-watchers. This has enabled us to work together in huge numbers and to co-ordinate labor in ways that would be unthinkable if each of us had to guess by the position of the sun.

Some have complained that being directed by this mechanical, artificial time rather than by the rhythms of nature and of our bodies has alienated us from nature. But much of our social organization, work and culture has been devoted to putting a little distance between ourselves and nature. Especially in the middle of winter, I prefer several layers of alienation between myself and nature.

Cyclical time

Traditional, or what were once called "prehistorical," societies were largely dominated by a cyclical view of time rooted in natural cycles. Human work and culture had no goals beyond surviving the seasons, unless it was to escape time altogether into some timeless form of existence.

Apocalypse: Riders of the Four Horses, by Durer.

This realm beyond time did not, however, mesh with the natural and infuse it with meaning. On the contrary, it existed in contrast to the finite world of daily life, so that all really meaningful events transpired outside of it in some mythical time beyond time.

The distinction between natural and mechanical marking of time has very little meaning in a context that doesn't give much status to uniquely human aspirations and hopes. The human story, in such cultures, is wholly overridden by the great natural and cosmic cycles. Only from the vantage point of someone comfortably distanced from the harshness of the natural cycles do these appear healing in and of themselves.

Even before sophisticated clocks and calendars, people used not only the rhythms of the seasons, the phases of the moon, and sunrises and sunsets – nature's timepieces – but also events to locate themselves in time.

The simple chronicles of events that predate our present calendars usually refer to the reigns of monarchs. The human drive to put one's stamp on history seems in some cultures to get almost completely invested in immortalizing monarchs and emperors.

The pyramids and the Valley of the Kings in Egypt are huge, architectural marvels that exceed even our present technology. All that unimaginable knowledge and labor was invested in immortalizing a single human being. How many thousands were indentured into lives of slavery, how many perished in the quest to assert the victory of one man over time and death?

The recent discovery in China of an emperor buried with many hundreds of full-sized ceramic figures of soldiers and horses also gives evidence of such an urge to transcend time. In the quest for such transcendence, rulers turned time into a destructive tyrant for huge populations.

Even today, although clock time figures prominently in our daily rhythms, it is seldom the most fundamental thing that shapes our perception of time. Our memories and imaginations are simply not dominated by the mechanical tick-tock of the clock or the numbers of the calendar. Memories and stories lend much more dramatic shape to our experience of life's temporal journey than does the abstract sequence of hours, days and nights, weeks and years.

Dwelling on 'our stories'

Nowadays there is much talk about the importance of telling and hearing people's stories, especially the stories of women, of ethnic and racial minorities, of homosexuals, of street people and of all those who formerly did not have a voice. Everywhere people are in the process of rewriting history, this time a history not dominated by kings and priests but a history of the forgotten and the marginalized.

To what purpose? Do all these histories add up to some greater reality? Is there some overarching unity or purpose that emerges from them? The reigning assumption is that all stories are of equal importance. To claim that there is some kind of grand, all-encompassing story that puts us into harmony with the central motor or plan of history would be to classify some as more central and others as marginal.

Each story does no more than give expression to the desires, hopes, dreams and illusions of each person or each group. None gets us more into contact with reality or truth; none describes the fundamental dynamics and conflicts of life in time more than any other.

If there is no purpose to these stories other than as a scream or a whistle against the overpowering wind of time, which will sweep them all into oblivion, aren't we back to the vision of time as the great devourer and destroyer? Only the eternal cycles of life and death like those of summer and winter have any reality in this view. Round and round. Tick-tock, tick-tock. Ending in an ocean where fullness and forgetfulness are the same thing.

From whence this pagan view?

How did we end this millennium moving toward what is basically a pagan view of time and history? Many have described the last few hundred years of Western hopes and efforts as driven by the idea of progress. It may be more accurate to describe it in the plural – as driven by progresses.

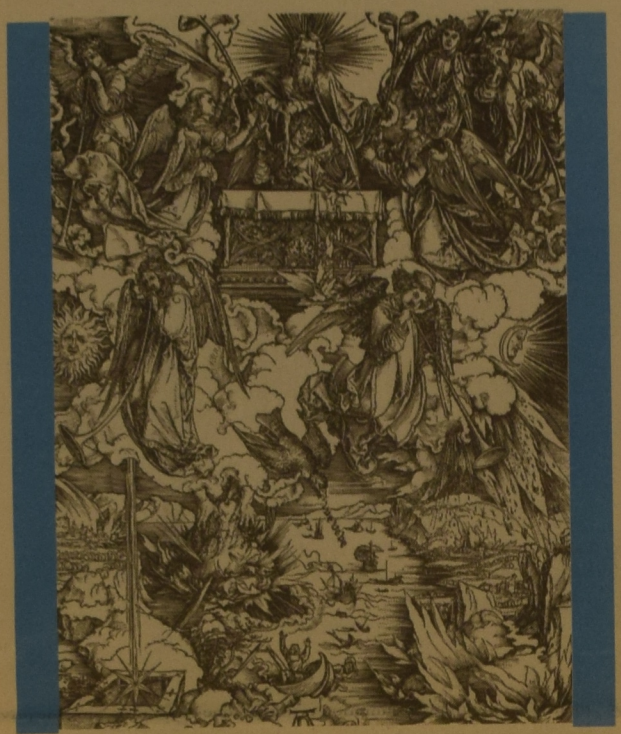
Modern culture consists of many different spheres of activity, each with its own appropriate goals. Lovers in one another's arms are not striving to realize justice or to produce a greater Gross National Product. Yet a glance at the percentage of our songs dedicated to love and passion as the be-all and end-all of human existence would qualify love as one of those mysterious constellations that seem to light up life in its totality with transcendent meaning.

Of course, justice can be a brightly burning beacon too, especially when it is linked with freedom and democracy. Many a young wife has waved good-bye to her lover as he went off to war, whether to repel a foreign invader or to bring about a revolution. Countless numbers have put love on the back burner to give their very lives for this "higher" ideal. Those who returned often found, to their chagrin, that those who stayed home were perhaps more interested in the business of making money than in sharing the privileges of democracy.

In peacetime, generating jobs quickly becomes more valuable than knowing how to march and shoot. And when there's fuel in the stove and bread on the table, some can bend themselves over old books and engage in abstruse discussions about truth, time and history, pretending that this is the heart of authentic living.

To name this multifarious activity "Progress" is rather general and vague. Not too many of us have consciously courted Progress as a mistress, for she is rather bland and featureless. But we have pursued many different goals that were undeniably good: responsible, secure homes in which to raise our kids; greater equality for all before the law; better health and health care; improved housing; better opportunities for all to pursue their interests and develop their talents; better education; greater participation in the political process; a dozen freedoms and just as many rights; a worship acceptable to God; truth and the freedom to speak it.

We've spoken of progress because we believed in ideals, in specific good goals, and in our capacity to shape life and history in conformity with them. We've pursued them all simultaneously and seriatim. They have given rise to organizations and institutions. They have become embedded in the warp and woof of our daily lives.



Durer's Apocalypse: Seven Angels with Trumpets

Together they constitute what we once called civilization and now culture. This contains or represents what it means to be human. When we think of passing on a heritage to our children, we think of various combinations of the stuff in this total package. These goods, not material goods, not money or some abstract notion of progress, are what we work to hand on as the accumulated wealth and wisdom of the race.

It is these ideals with their corresponding rhythms and disciplines that exert pressure on our lives; they spur us on to continued activity beyond just doing the minimum to survive. Our primary work is producing culture, and when we produce culture, we are to a great extent fashioning ourselves.

What hath Progress wrought?

As we near the end of the millennium, however, more and more people have been looking around and asking where all this pursuit of ideals and betterment has brought us. They see a badly threatened environment, many people who still live in poverty and distress, many diseases that didn't exist in previous ages, people caught up in exhausting cycles of duties, a sense of meaninglessness and malaise that drives millions to drink and to drugs, high rates of crime and violence, discrimination against different races, against women, against minority religions, an economic system with a momentum all its own, and they ask whether our pursuit of all those high ideals has brought us any closer to happiness and goodness.

Everywhere they see despair and inequality and violence. And they are disillusioned. They become cynical. They reject the entire complex of ideals and norms that have generated all the industry and effort associated with Western culture.

The ironic thing is that they reject those ideals in the name of those very ideals. The pursuit of justice hasn't brought us justice, so let's dump the whole idea of justice altogether. The norms of love, marriage and family have brought heartache and divorce, so let's throw out the ideal of family, lock, stock and barrel.

Let us go into the future without illusions, stripped of all the cultural accretions, all the accumulated baggage of ideals and duties that keep us frantically jumping from one treadmill to another. Let us simplify; in fact, let's strip down to essentials: let's go into the new millennium naked. It is this sort of millennialism, not that of a few sensational crackpot sects, that dominates the horizon of the new millennium.

Ditching Christian culture

During the latter part of the Middle Ages, while what we now call the Reformation was still aborning, all over Europe, singly, in groups, in mobs, in organized movements, people chucked off the great achievement of Christian Culture that had been established by the alliance between church and state.

Some literally stood in the town square and stripped themselves naked to preach a return to the simplicity and innocence of Paradise. The worship and the Christian life espoused by the church, they proclaimed, was not the gospel preached by Christ. The popes and bishops, the great cathedrals, the entire hierarchy – these were entirely false, a manifestation of the anti-Christ.

Everywhere people dropped their former ways of life and became homeless wanderers like Jesus and the Apostles. Here and there a sort of fever took hold of crowds so that they attacked churches and monasteries, pillaging and burning them.

Leaders and preachers were seized by a similar vision of a new age in which the old order with its ranks and all the institutions that had existed for hundreds of years would be swept away and there would be only common folk. Some also talked of all things being held in common as in Acts, so that Marxist historians have labeled them as forerunners of communism.

In some areas, preachers like Muntzer drew such a large following that they were able to take control of entire cities – for a time. It didn't take long for the secular authorities to slaughter the rebellious mobs and for the church to burn the heretics and so restore the Christian order.

Soul-hippies

Our contemporary millennialists do not, for the most part, ditch Western culture and take to the road like the hippies of the '60s and '70s. They go to work and earn good wages, but they do not really believe in what they are doing, and they are very skeptical about the meaning of almost every sphere of culture. They are soul-hippies. Cultural parasites. It is only a matter of time before they experience the futility and emptiness of their lives. At some point they will begin to feel like automatons. What can fill this void? Work? Different work? Passion? Drugs? Violence?

Most Christians in North America find themselves rather heavily invested in upholding the existing order of our cultural traditions and institutions. It is rather easy for us to dismiss the End Times sects as part of a lunatic fringe, and its secular counterpart as a form of nihilism.

But when Jesus proclaimed that with him the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, didn't he sound more like the lunatic fringe than like us, the guardians of traditions and worldviews, founders and defenders of institutions and organizations, firm believers in good order and discipline?

In his preaching, Jesus condemns a goal-oriented work ethic and points instead to the flowers of the field. With regard to one's duties to parents, held very high in Jewish culture, Jesus says, "Let the dead bury the dead," and "Hate your father and your mother." He flips over a Roman coin and says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." He pronounces a blessing and proclaims as happy, not the successful, not the prominent, not the leaders and movers, not the winners and go-getters, but those who mourn, the poor, the down-and-out.

Jesus does not become a respectable member of the Jewish establishment; he becomes a gadfly and challenges traditional conceptions of piety, right and propriety. At last he is condemned by the Jewish religious leaders as a blasphemer, by Roman law as an outlaw, and by Greek culture as a fool – thrice cursed.

Lines to the Kingdom

For those who, like almost all of us, are so deeply imprinted and programmed by the urgencies of our time, with hardly enough hours in the day to discharge all our real and imagined obligations, it is good to listen to the millennarian prophets.

It is very, very easy for us to become so defined by the threads of duty and ideals that woven together create the texture of our time, that Jesus' proclamation that his Kingdom is near, on the very horizon of our lives is hardly heard anymore.

It is a cliche of cultural historians that our modern sense of time as linear and purposive is a product of biblical faith. This linearity becomes a mere illusion, however, when it is seen as a line that we must complete. When it becomes a line to ideals and norms which it is our duty to realize in time, these norms become tyrannical. They turn into the very powers and principalities that Christ came to defeat and dethrone. And when our own highest, noblest values are the things we are working to defend and perpetuate in time, then we ourselves become the centre.

The lines that point to the coming of the Kingdom, to the radical renewal of humanity and the earth, are once again bent into cycles. That's why so many today experience our history and our time as a vicious treadmill, not as a lifeline to renewal, to the rule of righteousness and peace.

There is something right, then, about this impulse to ditch it all and to enter the millennium, the new age, naked. Every time a baby is baptized, we are all submerged

Durer's Apocalypse: St. John Beholding 7 Golden Candlesticks.

to wash away all that is tainted with sin. And what isn't tainted? We are raised like newborns, naked and dependent, without the clothes of culture and civilization to make us beautiful and acceptable.

Jesus did not die, however, to send us naked and unprotected into the world. He promised to clothe us with his Word and Spirit. This raises the big question: on what basis do believers appropriate and participate in their culture and society. It is the question addressed by Charles Colson in his most recent book, *How Now Shall We Live?*

In the next issue, *Christian Courier* will take a look at this important and exciting work. Until then, we are left standing naked at the turn of the millennium – naked but safe in the hand of God.

Featured Book

Christ, the 'definitive hinge' in human history

Tony Heida

Desire of the Everlasting Hills

By Thomas Cahill.

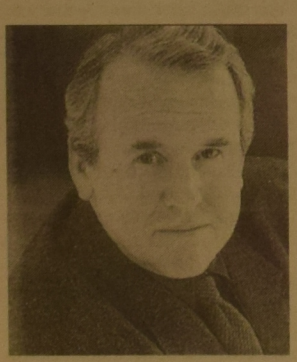
New York: Nan A. Talese (an imprint of Doubleday, a division of RandomHouse), 1999. ISBN 0-385-48251-5. 353 pp. $35.95 (Cdn);

To me, one of the most revealing images of Jesus is found at the close of John's Gospel. The post-Resurrection Christ, in the early morning hours, arrives unannounced on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. In the distance, on the water, float his disciples – now evidently fishers only of fish. However, fuzzy-headed from the topsy-turvy events of the last weeks, they have lost their former maritime touch. Indeed, after a full night on the water they have no fish to show for their troubles. Jesus, sensing their plight, offers some advice: "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some (fish)!"

A miracle quickly ensues and nets are soon filled to bursting. Overjoyed, the disciples come ashore, discovering, as they suspected, their full-of-surprises friend Jesus waiting, welcoming, with breakfast ready.

In short, a most compelling scene is captured of Jesus and the disciples on the beach eating what becomes, in effect, the last breakfast. But that is not all. During the course of that breakfast, Jesus famously forgives Peter what Peter would never have been able to forgive himself: three soul-wrenching denials made days earlier in the dreadful hours before Golgotha.

Taken together, Jesus' actions on the beach form a fascinating, twin display of humanity and super-humanity. "Super-natural" enough to die, resurrect and forgive sin, yet fundamentally human and humble enough to employ the common touch and treat his disciples to breakfast, Jesus emerges – as he does throughout the Gospels – a paradox.



Thomas Cahill

He is as concerned, we discover, with our physical needs as our metaphysical ones. Jesus' disciples – all recipients of the same forgiveness offered Peter – are now realizing Jesus as the most liberating, loving force they will ever know. Having flipped around their perceptions of reality, having changed their *status quo*, Jesus has made a difference in their lives.

Narratives of grace

Does he still make a difference in ours? In *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* author and classical scholar Thomas Cahill writes with conviction that, yes, Jesus of Nazareth has changed our *status quo* too. Moreover, he has been and remains the definitive hinge in Western history.

Readers familiar with Cahill's writings will know that the "Hinges of History" have been his preoccupation for some time now, the quotation itself being the title given to his series chronicling the evolution of the Western world and the Western sensibility. Cahill's "Hinges" represent an ambitious attempt to capture, in his words, history's "narratives of grace" and to explain "the great gift-givers" of the Western world who "arriving in the moment of crisis, provided for transition, for transformation, and even for transfiguration, leaving us a world more varied and complex, more awesome and delightful, more beautiful and strong than the one they had found."

Immersed in ancient lives

Desire of the Everlasting Hills is Cahill's third "Hinges" installment (four additional volumes are planned). Preceded by the best-sellers *How the Irish Saved Civilization* and *The Gifts of the Jews*, it continues Cahill's practice of immersing readers in the ancient lives of his subjects.

Desire of the Everlasting Hills delves into Jesus's times in an exploration of just how different and emancipating the message of Jesus and his followers was. Cahill's writing brings this far-removed past to life in an engaging, contemporary (and sometimes provocative) manner.

He reminds one of that rare teacher who, in challenging students, animates and illuminates whatever matter is at hand, leaving it, by class's end, resonant with meaning. Although his subjects are ancient, even readers usually averse to the arid bones of antiquity can rest easy. Thankfully for all involved – subjects and readers alike – this is no dry history lesson, and the author no dusty professor.

Hardly the ideal

The stage set by Cahill, the very platform of Jesus' life, is ancient Judea, a land which had been for centuries under the fist of foreign military and political control. It was a time of all-consuming Greek and Roman cultural domination, personified by power icons such as Alexander the Great and the subsequent Caesars.

Jesus of backwoods Nazareth, erstwhile carpenter and itinerant rabbi, hardly approximated this ideal. Instead, Jesus' Jewishness coursed through his veins, giving prophetic voice to ethical truths too long beaten-up, subjugated and silenced. For the disenfranchised of that power-obsessed time, Jesus' message was exhilaratingly clear.

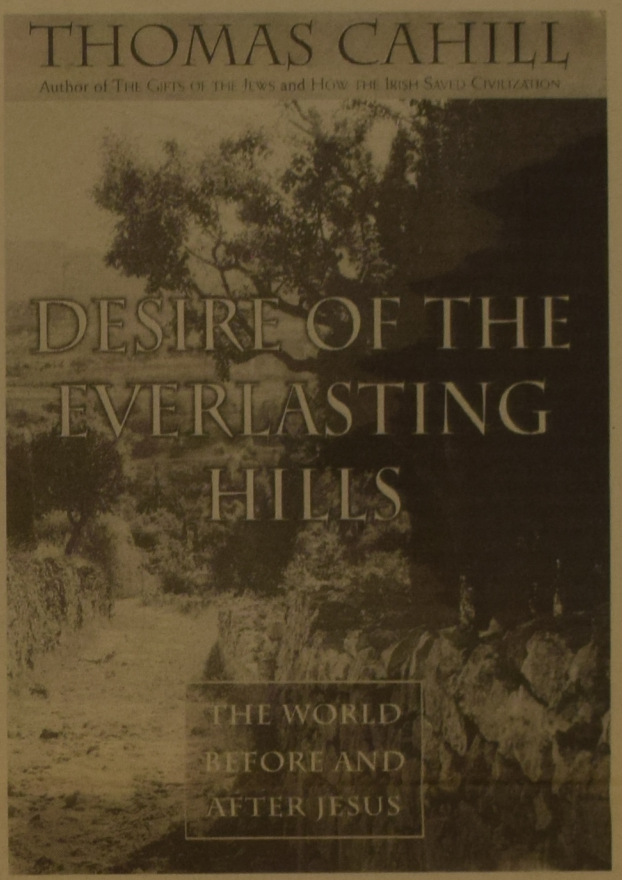
Full of compassion and healing, Jesus' ministry is distinguished by a willingness to reach out to all: whether rich or poor, of good or ill repute, Jewish or Samaritan, pure or untouchable. Ultimately characterized by a superior Love, it was a ministry that compelled him to Golgotha and that most undeserved and horrible of deaths.

The rest is more than history

The rest, of course, is more than just history. In Thomas Cahill's hands, the experience of Christ's early church becomes remarkably and joyously alive. Emboldened by Christ's Ascension and Pentecost, these believers become the people of "The Way," history's first Christians, living out communal lives of generosity and kindness.

Far-flung churches throughout the then known world are founded by tireless evangelists such as Paul, whose letters to distant friends and church families are written with such love and care that, to this day, they still inspire and guide Christians. Soon Jesus' message and mission can no more be retracted than the earth's rotation be reversed. As propelled by the Apostles and early church members, the Christian message touches lives in a way no other message does.

Desire of the Everlasting Hills often reads like a celebration of the wonders Jesus has already


THOMAS CAHILL
Author of The Gifts of the Jews and How the Irish Saved Civilization
DESIRE OF THE EVERLASTING HILLS
THE WORLD BEFORE AND AFTER JESUS

wrought and of those yet to come. For Cahill, the reasons to celebrate are as varied as the modern men and women who have served as the heirs of Christ's ageless redemptive work.

Cahill names but a few: the Catholic Worker movement founder Dorothy Day; Protestant civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.; Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero; Mother Teresa of Calcutta; Burmese opposition leader Aung San Sui Kyi; and Muslim economist and Grameen Bank founder Mohammed Yunus. That all have touched lives and changed times is not due to obscure twists of fate. Rather, they are the recipients – as, indeed, are those whom they have touched – of a timeless blessing.

Leave the slippery slope

At the dawn of the 21st century we Christians sometimes fail to appreciate how widely Christ's gifts have spread. Secular society, of course, makes it easy to assume Christ's values are not shared. Yet in acceding to that assumption we would choose despair over possibility.

There are many Christians who, rather than count blessings and foster opportunities, choose merely to assail society's slippery slopes and the perceived absence of Christian values in public squares. In *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, Cahill chooses differently.

In a particularly telling piece, he quotes Jewish novelist Chaim Potok's character Asher Lev.

"Traditions are born," Lev says, "by the power of an initial thrust that hurls acts and ideas across the centuries." Christ's gifts – his ideas, his death and resurrection, and his very atonement for "man's (continuing) inhumanity to man" – have been passed through the ages and have leavened the lives of individuals and societies with forgiveness, redemption, healing and love. The Spirit is still at work; there is no reason to believe that the effects of this thrust will not continue.

Tony Heida works in the human resources department of the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario.

Development in Central America

EL SALVADOR

Stories and photographs by Marian Van Til

Managing editor Marian Van Til traveled to El Salvador in October as part of a four-country visit partially funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The purpose of the trip was to observe the development work the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee is doing in Central and South America and to make CC's audience, and eventually a wider audience, more aware of such work and what it involves. This is the second- in a four-part series. (Part 1 was on Haiti, in CC, Dec. 13.)

Troubled history, better future

A map of a rural community provides crucial data, such as where the church and school are, and where the midwife lives.

Like virtually all countries in Central America, El Salvador has a troubled history. Gaining even a minimal knowledge of that history will help a visitor grasp the country's present realities. But interpreting that history – especially the recent 12-year civil war (1980-92) and its aftermath – can be like walking through a field of sinkholes. Unless you're aware there are dangers, the path can be treacherous: the history may vary greatly according to the teller.

El Salvador's civilization dates back to the pre-Columbian epoch some 1500 before Christ (interesting archaeological sites dot the country). The Spaniards "discovered" El Salvador in 1522 and called it "Cuzcatlan" – "Land of Precious Things." But the "precious things" did not include its people. The Spaniards, as elsewhere, fairly systematically annihilated thousands of the natives.

In 1524 the Spaniards returned, led by Pedro de Alvarado. Though he was wounded and defeated, and retreated to Guatemala, he commissioned both a brother and a cousin of his to carry on with the conquest for Spain. In 1528, the latter, Diego de Alvarado, established San Salvador (now the capital), which was moved to its present site in 1540.

For the next 300 years, El Salvador evolved under Spain's domination. In the 19th century freedom winds began to blow across the Americas, including rebellion against slavery. In 1811 one Father Jose Matias Delgado called for insurrection. A decade later the Act of Independence of Central America was signed in Guatemala (Sept. 15, 1821). For two brief years El Salvador was part of the Mexican Empire (1821-23), and then for 13 years part of the Central American Federation (1825- 38). It finally became an independent state in 1839. But as in Haiti (see CC, Dec. 13), independence was no panacea, and as in Haiti, its neighbors (especially Guatemala and Nicaragua) frequently and violently interfered in its affairs.

Land reform contentious

As coffee was widely and profitably cultivated in the 19th century, the inequitable wealth distribution this caused, and the still near-slavery of the peasant workers, sowed the seeds for future unrest, several repressive dictatorships and civil war. Not until the 1970s were there real attempts to create opportunities for the poor. This was done via "land reform," which put limits on the amount of land one person could own, and gave land to many who had no previous hope of owning any.

The land reform was a catalyst for the civil war. The reform attempts bred increasing left-right polarization – peasants generally on the left, landowners on the right – which erupted in guerrilla warfare, with extensive and controversial American support of government forces, as well as Cuban and Nicaraguan involvement.

In 1982 a right-wing coalition came to power, but José Napoléon Duarte, a Christian Democrat, was elected president in 1984. Attempts to negotiate an end to the war were unsuccessful, and Duarte was succeeded (in 1989) by a conservative ARENA party president. Leftist parties, which had boycotted elections in the '80s, participated in the 1991 parliamentary elections, and finally in 1992 a peace treaty was signed with rebels, ending the civil war.

The current president, Francisco Flores, also in the ARENA party, handily won election earlier this year. The difference now, say insiders, is that the right and left – enemies during the civil war – are remarkably working together, and to an extent which hardly anyone had anticipated. There has been a great deal of healing in the country: personal, political and in terms of gradually trying to build an infrastructure which will provide long-term stability.

Though things are looking up, extreme poverty juxtaposed with great wealth still plagues El Salvador. The poverty is caused both by systemic injustices and lack of education, the latter which results in an official 25 per cent illiteracy rate – which may be higher, as school attendance laws exist but are impossible to enforce in much of the country, which is rural and mountainous. All of which makes development work in the country so challenging and so necessary.

CRWRC in El Salvador

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) has a presence in El Salvador in its staff persons Jim De Borst, Glen and Cindy Musch, expatriate Americans, and Alva Lopez, a Salvadoran, additional indigenous office staff, and an office which bears the name CRWRC/ COMUNAD.

There is a small, struggling Christian Reformed Church in El Salvador which was formed by Christian Reformed World Missions. But its history, like that of the country, has not been a happy one.

Thus, unfortunately, CRWRC carries on its works with its four Salvadoran partner-agencies apart from contact with or input from the Salvadoran CRC. In fact, there have been some World Missions staffing problems here, and the work of that agency is being re-evaluated. There are good possibilities of CRWRC's working with the Reformed Churches of El Salvador, which are more attuned to social justice issues and to CRWRC's approach here.

The communities helped by CRWRC through its in-country partners are made up of Christians of various stripes. One of the partner agencies, ANAES, is Catholic-based.

Toward good health in every way

Among development agencies, the acronyms fly thick and fast: here, the partners are ANAES, ALFALIT, CELC (the Calvinist Literature and Education Committee). Then there's the Soy- apango Women's Project, and more recently, an association with the Fraternity for Peace.

ALFALIT and ANAES are CRWRC's two main indigenous partners. ALFALIT's primary work is running literacy programs and providing health care. ANAES does the same, in other communities, but it also supports agricultural projects.

Through CRWRC's long-term support, ALFALIT is coming of age, and has worked toward its own sustainability by means of capitalizing investment income, attaining legal status, and using its training centre to help community leaders provide literacy classes and to spread the word about what is involved in good health care. ALFALIT's "graduation" is also seen in the fact that CRWRC's financial support has been cut back as it is more able to support itself.

Great hospitality

During my visit I observed community projects set up by ANAES in the small, semi- mountainous rural community of San Nicholas, a couple of hours outside of San Salvador.

I was with Alba Lopez and three other Salvadorans. Our first stop was a home which doubled as a community training centre/classroom for carpentry, sewing and disparate useful skills.

It boasted electricity and a latrine, the latter a considerable improvement on open-pit outhouses – or using the out-of-doors, the most common method of relieving oneself in Central America (and most of the Third World).

Everywhere I went (Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras, Ecuador), people were extremely hospitable, and a major sign of that was being constantly offered food and drink. Here, I was served a bottle of *cold* pop. (Soda is ubiquitous in all these countries, perhaps because word is spreading – thanks largely to agencies like CRWRC and its partners – that drinking unsanitary water is dangerous).

We moved on. Down some dirt roads in our four-wheel drive vehicle, and then on foot for perhaps three-quarters of a mile, we came into a farmyard.

Under a huge, magnificently twisted tree (the species escapes me) was a circle of dark green plastic, stackable chairs. A few men who stood talking immediately came and shook my hand while introductions were made. More men, and some women, gathered and took seats, each coming over, smiling, greeting and shaking hands. Here it holds true, as in Haiti – which has an African- and French-based, not Hispanic and Indian, culture – as Mark Vanderwees (CRWRC Haiti) laughingly advised: "If it moves, shake it!"

The people I met in this farmyard ("supervised" by some very inquisitive loose-running turkeys) are direct beneficiaries of

Continued on page 16...

Three farmers explain how CRWRC's partner organization, ANAES, is helping them adopt better, environmentally friendly farming methods.

CRWRC in El Salvador

... continued from page 15

ANAES's – and CRWRC's – work. They explained just how they are benefiting, and what they are learning – and teaching others. Most of the men are farmers.

They explained that because of ANAES they are steadily moving toward using wholly organic farming methods. They learned that the constant use of chemical fertilizers and the same crops was what was depleting their soil.

"They are teaching us how to combine chemical and organic fertilizer now. In the end we want to use only organic fertilizer," explained a farmer named Santiago. "We are testing and are excited about using two types of beans to cover our parcels of land as 'green fertilizer,' to recuperate the soil," he explained. "This will also reduce our production costs."

Where formerly the men were reluctant to plant multiple small crops because it hadn't been done before, now, says Santiago, "I am cropping a small amount of everything. My family is eating from all of it and I am selling the rest."

He explained that "a few of us are doing this. The most people are accustomed to is two [different crops on their land]. We are dealing with the [soil depletion], and we are not burning the land or cutting trees anymore," he concluded.

The consensus was that, though at first it took a little courage to use these methods, the community is already seeing the benefits, and others are becoming more willing to commit to such methods.

ANAES has "provided loans for our crops. The bank asks for guarantees, which we can't give," I was told. ANAES has also given technical assistance, as Santiago described.

A showy tom turkey was one of several turkeys which kept watch over an outdoor meeting.

ANAES, which started work in this area in 1997, gets residents in a specific area to form a community board. This one had 11 members, with 42 participants active in various ways. The board "works along with the different committees": there's a farmers' committee, one for health, and a "mothers' committee" which focuses on income generation by and for women, and especially women (inevitably with children) who must support themselves.

ANAES makes small loans to the women. One woman, Marguerita, said, "What I receive I use to build up my house. Others may buy a cow or a pig. Some buy clothes, shoes, medicine, according to what they need." Then: "We are thankful to have these opportunities to support our families."

The mothers' committee teams with the health committee in teaching mothers how to improve their children's nutrition. The mothers' committee plays another important role: it talks to the women about self-esteem. "It has helped the women to value themselves," says Marguerita. "It also teaches us how [resources] need to be cared for, so they last beyond the present." The health commit tee provides maps in the community which show the school, church, soccer field, where the midwife lives. This committee plans public sanitation projects: the building of latrines, primarily – whose specially composted waste can eventually be used as fertilizer.

Teaching proper health care is crucial here; it lowers infant (and general) mortality rates. It must be remembered that a large majority of the population do not live with electricity, modern cooking facilities (charcoal fires are still the universal cooking fuel), running water (much less hot water), indoor plumbing (often no latrines or "outhouses" of any kind), or heated dwellings (the climate is near ideal, and the sun shines 360 days a year, but at night in the mountainous countryside it can get cool enough to require some form of additional warmth.

In these ways, and through teaching reading, CRWRC, via partners like ANAES, helps peasants take control of their lives. The community committee members are respected by their neighbors and seem to relish their "jobs,"as do ANAES's "promoters." A promoter, with the community boards, plans, prioritizes what needs to be done in a community, and sets goals. Then the work gets done, a true grass-roots effort.

There are evaluations every six months so that, as one promoter put it, "we know what they've accomplished and what they still need." CRWRC, meanwhile, must evaluate its own work – for the sake of the indigenous peoples; for the agency itself; for the CRC, which financially supports and sponsors the work; and for the sake of agencies like CIDA, which also provides crucial funds.

Projects continue, new plans are made, and CRWRC looks for new partners as the current ones become self-sufficient. And perhaps more than anything, CRWRC covets the prayers of the church.

Pilgrimage to Israel

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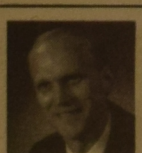

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Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

December seems to be a natural time to evaluate how well we have lived our lives during the year gone by. Are we happy with how we have spent our time? Did we accomplish what we set out to do? Have we nurtured the relationships that are important to us. Have we made life just a little easier for someone in need?

For many of us the year flew by. We probably cannot remember how many days were spent frantically working through a "have to do list" put together the night before, the criteria ranging from "the most urgent" to "the sky won't fall (I hope!) if this doesn't get done."

Our Information Age is more like the Age of Interruption. How many of our lives are a frantic maze of chores as we clean, shop, plan meals, ferry kids, pay the bills, attend meetings, visit the sick, fix the car, paint the fence, sort clothes for the poor – all while we work full or part-time? Rarely do we finish a task before another needs doing. And so, we're on hold in a call-waiting world.

The speed of life

The pace of life was not always this way. And yet lives were well lived. I often think of my grandmother, who was about 50 years old when she became ill and bedridden in the mid-1930s. The eldest daughter took care of the home. There was the usual hustle and bustle of family life, but days went by more slowly and quietly. My grandmother's childen would sit at her bedside and talk to her after school or after work. My grandfather would tell her about the sermon after the Sunday service.

Life in the '90s is lived at a frantic pace. Phrases such as "time crunch," "fast food," "rush hour," "frequent flyer," "expressway," "same day sevice" or "overnight delivery" and "rapid transit" are common to our ears. Speed is of essence. The letter carrier delivers less meaningful mail but our fax machines spit out letters by the dozens. Faster still is e-mail, which, in turn, requires an immediate reply. I often wonder – is there a speed limit to life. And what happens when we exceed it?

The measure of our days

While the world may still be accelerating, we are not to be its defenseless victims. Various articles and books have been written on how to manage the speed of life. Few, however, address the heart of the matter.

Time has two components. First, there is inner time: our personal sense of the rhythms of time, experienced differently by each of us. Second, there is imposed time: the time around which society organizes itself and the time we go by when meeting deadlines and schedules. Unfortunately, these two times are often now at odds with each other.

While imposed time can be managed, it is often our inner time that becomes troublesome. This is the place in which feelings, thoughts and attitudes about who we are in relationship to others and God play themselves out in relationship to time. Feelings of inadequacy can set us on the treadmill of workaholism in order to prove ourselves worthy. On the other hand, a healthy sense of self can reflect a calm and peaceful sense of inner time – feeling secure in the wideness of God's grace.

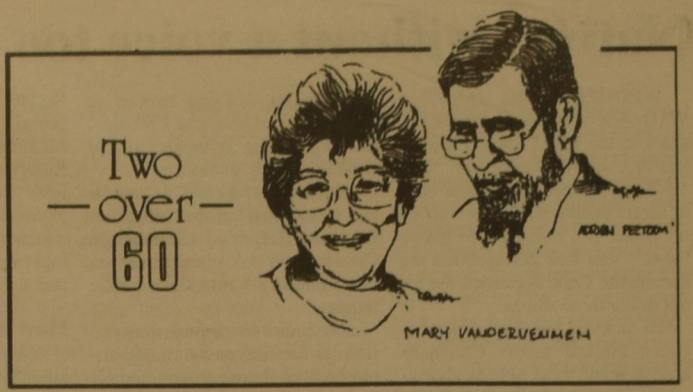
The hours given to us are a gift from God. My grandmother died at an age when many other women are beginning a new stage in life. She had few choices and faced many internal challenges with great faith. Such was the measure of her days. I only hope to do as well.

Arlene Van Hove is a psychotherapist with Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.

Comment

Moving on

With this issue, Mary VanderVennen and Adrian Peetoom bid CC readers goodbye. They have decided that the end of this milestone year, perched as it is on the edge of a new millennium, is a good time to pack up their respective pens and turn their attention to other pursuits. We thank them for their good work for us and for you our readers. And we wish them God's blessing in the months and – we pray – years of retirement ahead of them. MVT



Dear Mary,

Our last column together. By my count it is number 34, which means we've been at it almost three years. Before you and I started, I shared a column with Bert Witvoet for nine issues. And I estimate I wrote another 60 articles or so on my own, most in a series called "For the time being...." The end of a personal era?

Some kind readers might say: why stop? You're not that old. (I'm 65.) True. But I'm guided these days by observations about growing old, through watching the generation just ahead of me, through reading and personal reflections. Frankly, I do not wish to fight growing old. However hard this may be, I want to resist the tenor of our culture that denies aging, ending, dying. I want to experience those as consciously as I can. I want to consciously say goodbye to lifelong patterns and abilities as these fade away.

So here are some of the resolutions Johanna and I have made:

*** Let go of a home with its garden and independence.**

As you know, we did that a year ago, and we are happy in an apartment condo where so much is done for us; and we don't feel any the less independent for living here.

*** Let go of specific organizational leadership roles.**

We won't let our names stand for any organizational executive functions anymore. And we won't worry about where younger folk will take those organizations. We had our chance to shape them, and now we need to bow out.

When we were young we asked for trust. Now we shall provide it. We'll watch on the sidelines when others make specific organizational decisions. We'll offer counsel but only if asked for. We'll serve on committees but only if pressed.

*** Monitor our driving for signs of impairment.**

We hear old people bragging about passing driving tests once more. We don't admire them.

We already feel our driving abilities slipping, especially at nights, during rain, in tight-spot parking, and in busy traffic on superhighways when surrounded by trucks. We hope to give up driving just before we really need to, sell our car, and reorganize our lives to cope with that. Who knows? We may be saving someone's life this way.

*** Monitor ourselves for signs that it's time to leave our condo.**

We're already on the waiting list for a place where sensitive care is available for aging bodies, memories and attitudes. Where we shall be surrounded by people whose stories are like ours and whose lives have had at least some similar patterns. We have watched those who have postponed such a decision only to be forced into it, sigh with deep happiness, "I wish we had done this years ago."

*** Read less for information and more for personal reflection.**

Johanna is way ahead of me on this, and I'm learning from her. Both of us wish to deepen our self-understanding in relationship to God, especially in reflections on his personal gifts to us and our companion responsibilities. A sort of personal life's report card in which specific failings are no barrier to an ultimate "passing," all because of the grace of God, promised and experienced.

*** Keep clearly in mind that most of the resolutions above might not have the binding force we think.**

This last cautionary resolution owns up to some facts:

1. What we do or don't know will matter less and less to others, and therefore we can be very flexible.

2. Letting go of lifelong patterns and abilities is a wrenching matter. That we have also learned from the generation just ahead of us. The wish to grow old gracefully is constantly assaulted by realities of personal pride, cultural propaganda and the fact that death remains an enemy. It is easy to formulate splendid resolutions in a contented state of mind, still in good health, able to play a tough game of tennis, walk a long distance, bike a wide swath, travel the globe, argue a good case. It is hard to let go before being forced to.

So when you and I meet over the next few years, inquire about this list by all means. But be gracious when discovering that we're not quite so sanguine then, a bit ornery perhaps, resentful of failings and pretending we're still young. We'll be kind to you as well (we hope)!

And many thanks for your companionship on this column road. It's been a real deep-down, satisfying pleasure. This column was a wonderful gift at this stage of my life. An opportunity to explore without fear, clarify without worry, share and not be diminished, feel enriched by a partner. I know the end of this column is not the end of our friendship, contact and exchanges of views.

Love,
Adrian Peetoom

Dear Adrian,

There is always a bitter-sweet quality to doing something for the last time, isn't there? I will miss thinking about what to write or how to reply to what you've written. I will miss the regular contact with you and the discipline of producing something readable every month. I will miss the contact from many people who have taken the time not only to read the column but to give us feedback on it.

On the other hand, three years is probably enough for most columns, or at least for most columnists. And much as I've enjoyed the discipline of the monthly exercise, I am not sorry to let that aspect of it go. Retirement doesn't lend itself so well to deadlines.

I like your old-age manifesto! Unlike Dylan Thomas, we want to "go gentle into that good night," not "raging against the dying of the light." As you point out, that's relatively easy to say when we are still in good health and have lots of mobility. We haven't really been tested yet. But I think the attitude of facing the reality of declining energy and physical stamina, and deciding how we will move into it is the most important thing. Facing the realities allows us to embrace the opportunities of this time of life: time to read and reflect, time to tie up some loose ends of our experience, to enjoy old friendships and even some new ones.

As you say, we've done our part and it's time for the next generation to move centre stage. But there again, the attitude with which we let go is so important. Some people in our generation get pessimistic and cynical and simply withdraw from any action. They get depressed and are depressing to listen to.

But you talk about an act of trust, a much different thing. When we trust, we are free to support or lend a hand as asked or needed. Or we are free simply to relax and watch – and even be surprised that sometimes – occasionally! – things go better than when we were in charge.

So we go out with the millennium. Maybe there's something symbolic about that. In any case, I treasure the friendship we have developed over these years, and I trust we will raise many a glass of sherry together in times to come.

Shalom!
Mary

Adrian Peetoom is a retired educational editor who lives in Waterloo, Ont. Mary Vander Vennen is a retired therapist who lives in Toronto.

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Natives without a voice too easily forgotten, says Van Eek

WINNIPEG, Man. (MCC) – When Arie Van Eek spoke to delegates at the MCC Canada annual meeting in Winnipeg on Nov. 19-20 he asserted that "it's so easy to forget people who have little or no voice. It's also easy to blame them." Van Eek commended the Mennonite Central Committee for not doing those things.

He pointed out similarities between biblical motifs Christians hold dear and those held by aboriginal communities. He referred to biblical references addressing the inter-dependence of people and the land. Many aboriginal groups do the same. Many aboriginal groups also talk about living life in community, he said. Being isolated from community is one of the worst things that can happen to them. Similarly, "for a Christian, the worst thing is being isolated from the family of God."

Van Eek, a retired CRC pastor and former head of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, was a commissioner on last summer's Cross Lake public inquiry.

The inquiry's commissioners – from as far away as South Africa – represented church groups, aboriginal peoples, human rights experts and others. They listened to the stories of people from the aboriginal communities affected by the 1970s hydro-electric project. The inquiry's findings will be released in early 2000.

The Manitoba Aboriginal Rights Coalition (MARC), comprised of representatives from Mennonite, Anglican, Christian Reformed, United, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Unitarian churches, organized the inquiry which was held June 21-25. Hearings were held in both Winnipeg and at Cross Lake.

How important is truth?

Van Eek also spoke more specifically about what he heard at the inquiry. He said the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) signed by northern aboriginals in Manitoba, the Manitoba and federal governments and Manitoba Hydro was considered a treaty by the northern signatories. To them, the treaty was not considered an instrument that would pit people against people. It was meant to point out that there would be implications to the flooding and there would be a "truthful relationship" between the signatories in which issues like mass poverty and mass unemployment could be eradicated.

"The dominant society has not seen it as that. Economic issues are the top priority and the NFA was seen as a way to quickly resolve something." The governments involved and Manitoba Hydro see it as a business arrangement, not a treaty, he said.

"Money cannot buy what the aboriginal people need. There is more to it than a five year payout. What's needed are new sources of income – a new way of using their gifts. Governments want aboriginal young people to go to school and do the same things we do. That is not something we should want to impose on them."

Double frustration

Van Eek expressed frustration with both the federal and provincial governments in Canada.

"I have a lot of difficulty praying for our government," he admitted. The United Nations has called Canada one of the best places in the world to live. The people of the North are subsidizing Canadians' standard of living, he said. "The true cost [of Canadians' standard of living] has never been calculated, and it ought to be," he concluded.

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News Comment

Nose for News

Bert Hielema

THIS IS THE LAST column of the millennium. Perhaps you should skip reading it, because I am afraid that it contains little to cheer about. I thought that it might be a good idea to browse through some of the books I have which deal with the year 2000 and beyond, but now that I have done this I am not so sure it *was* a good idea. Yet I'll risk your wrath. I went through the places in our home where I store my many books – not organized at all, and scattered all over the place – and found 19 on this subject, all by well-recognized scholars. Out of these I picked half a dozen.

I STARTED WITH AN oldie, a 400-page volume from 1993: *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* by Paul Kennedy, professor of history at Yale University. Dr Kennedy, a devout Roman Catholic, is concerned about the worldwide population explosion (tripled in the last 70 years) which has led to over-grazing, soil erosion and the clearing of tropical rain forests.

He argues that it also tends to produce regional conflicts, global warming, flows of refugees and great pressure on developed countries to admit immigrants. He concludes: "Nothing is certain, except that we face innumerable uncertainties; but simply recognizing that fact provides a vital starting point, and is, of course, far better than being blindly unaware of how our world is changing.... What is clear is that we face not a 'new world order' but a troubled and fractured planet whose problems deserve the serious attention of politicians and public alike.... If these challenges [the complex task of preparing for the century ahead] are not met, humankind will only have itself to blame for the troubles, and the disasters that could be lying ahead."

THEN THERE IS Toronto's own Mark Kinwell, who teaches philosophy at the University of Toronto. A lapsed Catholic, his book is entitled: *Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink*. Perhaps the title says it all. So I will be brief and just quote this: "The true threat of millennial anxiety, the true apocalypse, is not the fire and brimstone promised in Revelation, the wailing and gnashing of teeth of Judgment Day. It is instead the destruction of hope, of faith in ourselves. The Armageddon we face is the elimination of the idea that there is anything we can do to make this world one in which we feel at home."

NEXT IN LINE I put Eric Hobsbawm. Born in 1917 and educated in Vienna, Berlin, London and Cambridge, he is a Fellow of the British and the American Academy of Arts and Science and taught at the University of London. His book is called *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. First published in 1994, its 600 pages went through seven printings in three months.

Hobsbawm, a life-long communist, claims that capitalism became possible because of the cultural revolution of the later 20th century, which saw the individual triumph over society and which broke the ties which, in the past, had woven human beings into social communities and structures.

He writes: "For the first time in two centuries, the world of the 1990s entirely lacked any international system or structure." He asserts that "at the end of the 20th century the most ancient guides to the perplexed of this world, the traditional religions, provided no plausible alternative."

Hobsbawm further observes that "by the end of the century, the nation state was on the defensive against a world economy it could not control ... [yet] one way or another, the fate of humanity in the new millennium would depend on the restoration of public authorities."

He concludes: "We live in a world captured, uprooted and transformed by the titanic economic and techno-scientific process of the development of capitalism, which has dominated the past two or three centuries. We know that it cannot go on *ad infinitum*. The future cannot be a continuation of the past, and there are signs, both externally, and as it were, internally, that we have reached a point of historic crisis. The forces generated by the techno-scientific economy are now great enough to destroy the environment, that is to say, the material foundations of human life.... Our world risks both explosion and implosion. It must change.... The price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness."

NUMBER FOUR WAS BY the Hungarian-born and U.S.-educated John Lukacs, who is a deeply troubled Christian. In his *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age*, he sees Adolf Hitler as the century's radical revolutionary, and the two world wars the century's watershed events. In terms of spirits of the age, both he and Hobsbawm see the 20th century as having ended around 1990 and begun in 1914 when the 19th century "ended" (it started in 1815 with the defeat of Napoleon).

This professor and author of 17 books writes that "people in AD 1000 did not know that they lived in the Middle Ages. We are more aware of historical time than was any previous generation in the history of mankind....What threatens the essence of what remains of our civilization is the growing presence and the rising threat of barbarism and barbarians within our cities and nations.

"So in the 1990s we also know what people five hundred years ago did not know: that we are approaching the end of an entire historical area.... We know that the advance of technology and barbarism are no longer irreconcilable."

He concludes: "Near the end of the 20th century two dangerous circumstances threaten the world. One is the institutionalized pressure for material and economic growth – contrary to stability and threatening nature itself. The other is the existence of the populist inclinations of nationalism – contrary to a greater and better understanding among peoples, often debauching into barbarism. One is the thrust for increasing wealth; the other, for tribal power."

I ENDED MY SEARCH with an eminent economist: the prolific author and Scholar of the Year as selected by the New York Council of the Humanities: Dr Robert Heilbroner. He has written two books on our topic: *Twenty-First Century Capitalism* and *Visions of the Future: The Distant Past, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, the latter based on public lectures held in his home city, New York.

In his first book, he quotes Schumpeter, another economist: "Capitalism creates a rational frame of mind which, having destroyed the moral authority of so many institutions, in the end turns against its own." Heilbroner favors "participation," which he defines as "a world in which widely shared decision-making by discussion and vote displaces decision-making by self-interest alone, or by persons privileged by wealth or position to make unilateral determinations." He concludes that "participatory economics will not become the social order in the 21st century no matter what, catastrophes included."

IN HIS OTHER BOOK Heilbroner states that Yesterday's optimism has faded and "apprehension is the dominant view of Today." And Tomorrow? The agnostic Dr. Heilbroner discerns a gnawing sense, if not quite dread, of unease because of impending judgment. Armageddon is still expected.

YES, I THINK I WAS right: I should not have written all this, not in the last column of 1999. So now: how should I end it? I can come with the pious platitudes that, in the end, all will be well, but that would be inconsistent. The words in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 – "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive" – somehow play through my mind. You know that I am a firm believer in the New Creation, and secretly I often wish that the days of great disasters and the Final End will come soon. And I am not alone in this. The unbelieving Heilbroner expects a Day of Reckoning; Mark Kingwell does, as well. Here is what Kingwell writes: "There is a perverse part of us all that longs to see the final spectacular act in the tired human drama, to share the big-bang ending, to feel the deep satisfaction of ultimate narrative closure."

I DON'T WANT TO SOUND like a preacher, but at the end of this period in human history and the beginning of a new one, I am reminded of the conclusion of the Apostle Peter's two letters, in which he tells us to live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the Great Day, and somehow, each in her or his own way, to speed its coming. We can advance the coming of the Day of the Lord by thinking and praying and often repeating the words, "*Maranatha*, Lord come quickly." I do it when I am running, using it as a mantra to keep a steady pace.

Bert Hielema lives in Tweed, Ont., where he is physically active by running, walking, biking and skiing an average of 35 km per week. His web address is: www.geocities.com/hielemab

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Obituary

MRS. LENA LANGENDOEN
(nee STOLK)

"... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6b)

It is with great joy that our mother and Oma passed away into the presence of our Lord on November 10, 1999 at Shalom Manor, Grimsby.
She was loved dearly by her family and friends and will be missed for her love, faithfulness and commitment to our Lord and to her family.
She is survived by her children:
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John & Audrey Van Dyk (Langendoen)
Loved by her 14 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.
Correspondence address:
Mrs. Mary Vander Flier, 11 Juliana Cres., St. Catharines, ON L2M 4B5

Job Opportunity

John Knox Memorial Christian School in Fruitland, Ont., is seeking a **part-time custodian.** This is an evening position of approximately 4-5 hours per day. If interested please contact Jim Bergshoeff **(905-945-0397)** or the School **(905-643-2460)** for a job description and/or questions.

Personal

Interested in meeting a nice gentleman 45-55 years for correspondence /friendship with an attractive 50-year-old single woman who likes conversation, nature and fun times. Respond to file **#2700 c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1**

Obituaries

"In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God, we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him, let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:9)
This is the passage Pastor Peter VanEgmond used at the memorial service for

HILDA LUTGENDORFF-v.d. VEEN

who fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 92, on December 3, 1999.
She was the widow of Lourens Lutgendorff, who preceded her into glory in 1986. As children we look back in gratitude on their lives. We praise God for all they meant to us. And we recognize their contribution to the cause of Christian education in Holland and in Ontario.
John & Tineke Lutgendorff, Brampton
Edith & John Vos, Navan
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And her dear grandchildren, their spouses and her great-grandchildren.
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1920 - 1999

Suddenly on December 7, our dear husband, father and grandfather

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went to be with our Lord. Our comfort is Psalm 91:1, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty".
Lovingly remembered by his wife Anje (Havinga) of 55 years and his children and grandchildren:
Pia & Jake Ypma
Esther & David, Patrick, Ingrid
Corrie & John Kamphof
Eric & Karen, Joel, Nathan
Bill
Home address: 20181 Grade Cresc.
Langley, BC V3A 4J5

Personal

Healthy, active Christian widower, early 70s, wishes to meet a lady who loves the Lord and enjoys life. Please send letters to file **#2699 c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1.** All inquiries will be given a reply.

Teachers

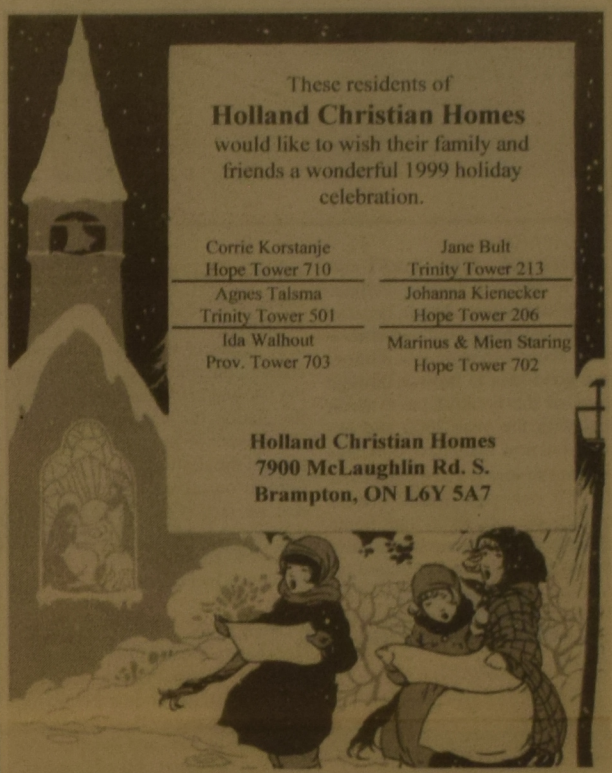
Centennial Christian School, Terrace, B.C.: Teaching position open.
Centennial Christian School invites applications from committed, Christian educators to fill a new opening due to increased enrolment for January 2000 in the following area:

Intermediate - Grade 7

This position may also involve duties in other areas.
Centennial Christian School is an interdenominational school and presently offers Christian education to approximately 230 students in Kindergarten - Grade 10. Please send letter of application, resume and other pertinent information to:

Centennial Christian School
Frank Voogd - Principal
3608 Sparks Street
Terrace, B.C. V8G 2V6
Phone: 250-635-6173
Fax: 250-635-9385

Miscellaneous



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OCSTA requires a competent, personable, self-motivated, professional, individual who has an understanding of Christian education as it happens within the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. The successful candidate will be responsible for providing administrative and secretarial support to the Executive Director and the organization.

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Please forward your resume no later than January 7, 2000 to:
OCSTA Search Committee
777 Garner Road, East, Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4
Fax: (905) 648-8670 Email: ocsta@netcom.ca
(The OCSTA office is located at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario)

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e-mail: rklassen@mutualsupport.net
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We are seeking a leader with a commitment to Jesus Christ for an interdenominational 7-12 school with an enrolment of over 300 students, beginning September 2000. Applicants should have a commitment for a reformed world lifeview of Christian education and have administrative and team-building abilities. If you would like to join our three-campus society in providing high-quality Christian education, please reply to:

Mrs. Grace Holtrop
PO Box 116
Diamond City, AB T0K 0T0
Phone: 403-328-6995

Or e-mail to: **Principal Search Committee**
eddehaan@hotmail.com

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Rick Delau, Search Committee,
Houston Christian Reformed Church
Box 6, Houston, BC V0J 1Z0
phone: 250-845-7756 fax: 250-845-7578

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Review of applications will begin December 15 and continue until the position is filled. Qualifications include a Ph.D. in theology or religion and demonstrated teaching excellence. To apply, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of inquiry and a curriculum vitae/resume:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Telephone: 712 722-6333
Facsimile: 712 722-4496
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/acadaff

Dordt College encourages the nominations and candidacies of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities.

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Dordt College is seeking applications for openings beginning August 2000 in the following areas:

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Generalist

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Psychology (Possible position)
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Theatre Arts (2 positions)
Design and Theatre History
Directing and Acting

Theology (One year position)
General education courses in biblical theology and upper level biblical studies courses

Evaluation of applications will continue until the positions are filled. To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and a curriculum vitae/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Telephone: 712 722-6333
Facsimile: 712 722-4496
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
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Dordt College encourages the nominations and candidacies of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities.

HAMILTON DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

Many *Christian Courier* readers will be aware of the sudden death of our teacher, friend and colleague, **Mr. John Buesink.** In full respect for his years of faithful service, we place this advertisement in search of qualified staff to continue the unfinished work.

We invite qualified teachers to apply for four teaching sections starting February 1, 2000.

Teachers with expertise in Business, Consumer Studies, Law, English or Geography are of special interest to the HDCH community.

We thank CC readers for your love, support and prayer during this period of grief. You helped to strengthen our faith and encouraged us to look to God in every life experience.

Qualified candidates are invited to apply by fax, phone or e-mail to: **Mr. Jim Vanderkooy, Principal**
905-648-6655 (phone)
905-648-3139 (fax)
jvanderkooy@hdch.org (e-mail)

Laurentian Hills Christian School of Kitchener, Ontario,
is seeking a

Full-time Principal

starting in August 2000.

- We are an interdenominational K-8 school affiliated with the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and Christian Schools International. Our mission is to teach our children to recognize their place in God's world, providing an education that promotes a life of Christian service. We offer a full program of studies in a newly expanded facility, with 14 staff members serving a student population of 220.
- Our proactive Board is searching for a faith filled principal who is experienced in the team leader style of management, has excellent administrative strengths and an interest in partnering in strategic planning.
- If you have 3 to 5 years of administrative experience, we would like to hear from you. Candidates must have a Bachelor's degree, as well as a Teacher's certificate. Preference will be given to candidates with a CSTC or a CSPC.
- Applicants will include a statement of faith which describes their walk with the Lord and the educational implications of that relationship.

Please direct inquiries, resumes and statements of faith to:

Sandra Moon
614 Pine Island Crescent
Waterloo, Ontario
N2V 1T4

Application Accepted for Two Principal Positions

Abbotsford Christian School, a multi-denominational school system serving over 1100 students at 3 campuses, is inviting applications for an elementary (K-7) principal at the Heritage campus and a high school (8-12) principal at the secondary campus.

We are looking for experienced and enthusiastic leaders who are deeply committed to Christian education and are excited about working as part of a leadership team.

Application deadline: Dece,ber 31, 1999
Please direct resumes or inquiries to:
Ed Noot, Principal
Abbotsford Christian School - Clayburn Hills Campus
3939 Old Clayburn Road, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 1J9
Phone: 604-850-2695, fax 604-850-7075
E-mail: enoot@uniserve.com

Obituary

Leiderdorp, the Neth. — Wellandport Ont.
June 19, 1908 - Dec. 6, 1999
ANNA VERBURG
(nee DEKONING)

Our dear Oma Verburg finished her long journey on this earth. Ill and tired she prayed that the Lord would take her Home. He did. We are glad and we are sad.

Her children:
Nick & Marrie Verburg — Dunnville
Peter & Anne VanWyngaarden — Wellandport

Her grand- and great-grand-children:
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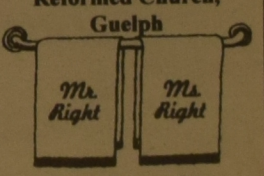

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519-822-7720

Advertising

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PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SCHOOL – Victoria, BC

ADMINISTRATIVE OPENINGS

Pacific Christian School is a well-established, dynamic, inter-denominational Christian School system with 750 students in pre-school through grade 12. The school draws its enrolment from 80 different churches representing 14 different denominations in the greater Victoria area.

A SECONDARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL is required to fill a leave of absence for the 2000/2001 school year.

A SECONDARY PRINCIPAL is required for September 2001 to direct and oversee the operation of the high school with a staff of 25 and an enrolment of 330 students in grades 8-12. The secondary principal would join an administrative team that includes the elementary principal and a business manager in providing a viable Christian education for the pre-school through grade 12 system. A successful applicant could serve as Assistant Principal or possibly as Co-Principal for the 2000/2001 school year to allow for a smooth transition.

Candidates must be committed Christians, be team players, and be able to articulate a sound vision of Christian education. Candidates are expected to demonstrate spiritual, educational, administrative and financial leadership. Pacific Christian School seeks candidates that have exhibited successful experience in Christian School leadership and who qualify for a B.C. College of Teachers Professional Certificate.

Enquiries may be directed to John Messelink, Secondary Principal, at 250-479-4532 or Bill Helmus, Elementary Principal, at 250-479-9365. Please submit letter of application, resume and statement of faith by January 15, 2000 to:

Search Committee,
Pacific Christian School,
654 Agnes Street, Victoria, BC V8Z 2E6
fax: 250-479-3511

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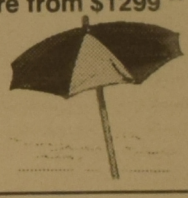

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Diverse protestors unite against WTO

. continued from page 1

working conditions for workers in developing countries; laborers trying to keep jobs from being exported to developing countries; advocates for children's rights who want to see child labor outlawed; consumers who want genetically modified foods banned (or labelled); small-is-beautiful folk who oppose the growing power of multinational corporations to dictate even the policy of national governments; a few radicals opposed to anyone in a business suit who makes rules for anything; and a few Canadians seeking to protect Canadian culture. These groups may not have agreed among themselves, but they were agreed about their passionate opposition to the WTO.

Why would people spend time and money to protest a bureaucratic process that, according to participants, is simply trying to lay down a few rules to make trade among nations more equitable? By agreeing on such rules, the WTO argues, there will be fewer trade disputes and disruptions. The "playing field," to use a favorite metaphor, will be made more even, business will prosper, economies will grow, more jobs will be created, lifting more and more people to the standard of living of the Western nations and the benefits of a high tech economy. This is the way to fight poverty.

The official logo of the WTO meetings in Seattle.

Multinationals rule?

Most of the groups which were demonstrating believe that the greatest, and perhaps the only, beneficiaries of these trade agreements will be the already rich corporations and their investors. Fewer people are swallowing the trickle-down theory of wealth, for they see more workers becoming unemployed as corporate profits grow and executive wages skyrocket.

PHOTO: FROM MUCHMORE.FREESERVERS.COM/WTO

"Complex international questions cannot be settled in the street."

Even people such as former Prime Minister of Canada John Turner and other traditional supporters of business and free enterprise are saying that it is impossible for the WTO to maintain a narrowly economic focus. Its decisions have an impact far beyond the economic sphere. Globalization is beginning to mean, some critics say, the domination of national governments by the interests of the multinationals. It tends to relegate "non-economic" concerns like the environment and the rights of children and workers to the margins.

This is debatable, of course, since most of the representatives at the WTO are sent there by democratically elected governments, and presumably speak for the interests of their people. Those interests, however, can be interpreted in very different ways.

Many of the protesting organizations charge that the procedures of the WTO are anti-democratic, because they do not admit those who speak with the voice of the people. The groups marching in the streets naturally assume that they do, no matter how small their membership. Those in favor of free trade point out that many of the organizations in the streets of Seattle were not calling for less but for more central control on the international level. This hardly enhances democracy.

Labor's demand that the same environmental policies in force in North America be enforced in developing countries calls for more, not less, regulation. To prohibit child labor and to call for better wages and working conditions also requires intervention in the affairs of sovereign states.

Globalization has quite clearly become a hot issue, and all signs point to the fact that it will become hotter still. One of the inventions that has accelerated globalization – the Internet – is now also a key instrument for its political opponents. We might say, ironically, that the very opponents of globalization are going global. In view of the effectiveness of the Seattle demonstrations, we can be sure that we will see more of such street politics in the future.

Globalization seen as irresistible force

Many politicians, perhaps because they have put a lot of their own apples in the basket of globalism, have been speaking of globalization as an irresistible force or as a universal law that must be obeyed. It is good to see this assumption challenged. However, complex international questions cannot be settled in the street. Simplistic moralism can often do more harm than good. Simply banning child labor, for example, although it sounds noble, may hurt poor families more than it helps them.

As Christians address problems in the political arena, responsible reflection, study and deliberation are becoming more crucial than ever. We confess that the Lordship of Christ has meaning for global politics, too. What that meaning is, however, is seldom obvious. To address such issues meaningfully and to shed the light of the gospel on them requires that we support Christian academic institutions, Christian think-tanks, Christian political organizations, and, yes, also Christian publications like *Christian Courier*. Without a healthy network of such organizations we will not be able to develop a credible Christian witness for the 21st century.

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News Digest

Tempest in a toilet

MALVERN, England – A British theatre company is staging a run of Shakespeare's plays in an old Victorian toilet, reports the *Toronto Star*. The Bog Standard Theatre Company spent three years and £4,000 (about $10,000 Cdn) to convert the facilities into a 12-seat venue with a tiny stage, in the western English town of Malvern.

"Shakespeare said 'All the world's a stage,' so I guess that includes toilets," quipped the troupe's Dennis Neale. "Ironically, we don't have enough room for a loo. The audience have to run across the road to public ones."

Baby girls wanted

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – "In a stunning repudiation of the traditional values that for centuries have put a premium on producing male heirs, surveys show that up to 75 per cent of young Japanese now prefer baby girls," reports the *Los Angeles Times*. "Daughters are seen as cuter, easier to handle, more emotionally accessible and, ever more important in this fast-aging society, more likely to look after their elderly parents."

Martian tourists wanted

BEDLINGTON, England – A northeastern English village is sending a message to Mars, thanks to NASA. The Chamber of Commerce of Bedlington contacted the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration recently via the Internet to ask if it could join in another mission to Mars. NASA agreed, so when a rocket blasts off for another mission to the red planet on the Mars 2001 Landing Mission, a CD-ROM guide to Bedlington will be on board. The town hopes it will become the prime destination for any Martians heading to Earth, reports the *Toronto Star*.

Parking problems...

A driver tucked a note under her windshield wiper and dashed off: "I've circled the block for 20 minutes. I'm late for an appointment, and if I don't park here I'll lose my job. *Forgive us our trespasses*."

Returning, she came back only to find a parking ticket and this note: "I've circled the block for 20 years, and if I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. *Lead us not into temptation*."